

Sister Solidarity: Compassionate Relationships among Popular Entertainers  
and Their Fellow Women in Medieval Japan

A Research Thesis

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by

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## ABSTRACT

The popular female entertainers of the Heian (794-1185) and medieval (1185-1600) periods of Japan were quite successful in establishing themselves as adept purveyors of song, dance, and sexual pleasures. Many female entertainers gained the patronage of the rich and powerful, such as emperors and prominent warriors. Both in historical records and fictional accounts, entertainers who were associated with a powerful patron would often have their names, and possibly stories about them as well, written down in medieval histories or literary narratives. However, most of the entertainers I will discuss in this study are fictional or semi-fictional characters found in narratives such as *The Tale of the Heike* (*Heike monogatari*) and Nō plays.

The three types of female entertainer featured most often in medieval narrative and Nō theatre are *asobime*, *shirabyōshi*, and *kusemai*, each of whom will be examined in depth in Chapter 2. In medieval narrative, female entertainers were often thrust into difficult situations by their patrons or by other unforeseeable circumstances, sometimes forcing the women to make a choice between retaining their livelihoods and becoming nuns. (The importance to a performing woman of finding and holding on to patronage will be discussed in Chapter 3). The trying circumstances in these stories more often than not act as prompts that cause beleaguered entertainers to turn to their fellow women for comfort and security. In fact, solidarity among female performers and fellow women is a recurring motif in a range of medieval literary works, or so I will argue. Chapter 4 will examine some representative medieval narratives. I will introduce the stories and the performing women from *The Tale of the Heike* and *Yoshitsune: A 15<sup>th</sup> Century Chronicle* (*Gikeiki*) that exemplify this solidarity theme. Other works inspired by

these stories, especially Nō plays, habitually place characters from medieval narrative sources into different or altered settings, but rarely do they drastically change the essence of a character or his or her story. There are many Nō plays about female performers, but three of the plays I will be looking at in Chapter 5 preserve, even further emphasize, the theme of solidarity among female performers introduced in earlier source narratives, while a fourth play utilizes the theme of solidarity in a story original to Nō. I will conclude with a short look at a recent historical drama on Japanese television that makes use of, if not recognizes outright, the solidarity trend among medieval female entertainers.

In the chapters that follow, I hope to be able to shed some light on why performing women were depicted in medieval narratives as having a propensity for creating strong kinship bonds with other women. I will explore female entertainers' documented ways of life, their power and marginalization in society, and how others viewed these women and their trade. Then, I will look at the various ways female entertainers are depicted in medieval narratives and Nō plays. While exploring these facets, I will attempt to show what the literary representations of solidarity among female entertainers might have been inspired by, and that these representations demonstrate a trend that allowed for depictions of entertainers as women who were both able and willing to create bonds of solidarity with the other women around them.

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## INTRODUCTION

The medieval period in Japan (1185-1600) saw the rise and fall of various different types of popular entertainment traditions. Among them are such famous performance styles as Nō and Kyōgen, which the eclectic, circus-like medieval arts of *sarugaku* and *dengaku* evolved into, along with many other styles that completely disappeared over time. Popular male and female entertainers sang, danced, and provided sexual services to patrons in exchange for goods and cash. Almost always, an entertainer's association with a patron of high social status would confer a rise in prosperity for an entertainer, as popular entertainers usually came from the lower classes. The appeal to the upper classes and the impact on history that different forms of popular entertainment in medieval Japan had is illustrated through much direct evidence, such as the multi-volume collection of *imayō* titled *Ryōjin hishō* ("The Dance of Dust on the Rafters"), compiled in 1179 by Retired Emperor Go-Shirakawa (1129-1192).<sup>1</sup> Because *imayō* ("contemporary style" songs whose lyrics covered a wide variety of topics) were usually sung by entertainers and commoners, they did not receive much recognition at court as a true art form until Go-Shirakawa bolstered the status of *imayō* with the upper classes by expressing great interest in the plebian art form. Another example of a medieval entertainment possibly changing the course of history would be the art of *dengaku* (lit. "field music"). Scholars have argued that *dengaku* was the final nail in the coffin of the Kamakura shogunate (1185-1333) since the last Kamakura regent, Hōjō Takatoki (1303-1333), had an "addiction to Dengaku and dog-fighting,"

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<sup>1</sup> According to Kim, "Presumably the original *Ryōjin hishō* consisted of two distinct parts, each comprising ten books...Regrettably, only small parts of the original are extant: from [part 1], a fragment of Book 1 (21 songs) and the complete book 2 (545 songs)...and from [part 2], a fraction of passages from Book 1...as well as the complete book 10, which is Go-Shirakawa's memoir" (xiv).



and concerned himself with these luxuries to the exclusion of all else (O'Neill 27).

Both men and women made livings and prospered as entertainers during the medieval period, but the microcosm of relationships among female entertainers is an interesting and rich facet of the larger community of medieval performers. Women entertainers are written as having played various roles in medieval Japanese society depending on who was doing the writing: sometimes they were depicted as dangerous deviants, sometimes they created pleasurable diversions for patrons, and much of the time, they were simply women trying to make a living in a world run by men, relying on each other for friendship and commiseration. I will argue that in medieval Japanese narrative and in the Nō performance tradition, no type of woman is portrayed as more consistently sympathetic to her fellow women than the popular entertainer. This argument can best be illustrated through pairs of two female performers, or one performer and another woman, whose stories of camaraderie through hardship and woe so captured the hearts of the Japanese populace that their tales have been depicted over and over in various mediums. Throughout my analysis, I will focus on certain prolific types of entertainment that were inclusive of women in medieval Japan, and the inspiring stories of the women who belonged to these specific entertainer groups. Many of the most famous and most disseminated stories featuring female performers as central characters deal with themes such as the performer's compassion toward fellow females, her struggle to find a balance between professional duty to a patron and personal empathy regarding other women, and the bond that is often formed between women as members of the same sex. This last theme especially seems to emerge as a major one whenever two women are placed together in a story and one of them is an entertainer.

In my second chapter, I will provide an overview of the types of popular entertainers that will be making an appearance throughout this paper and show some examples of the kinship

trend as displayed among *asobime*, some of the earliest and most prolific of entertainer women. My third chapter will illustrate how important it was for an entertainer to secure the patronage of someone important, as well as delineate the many disparities between court women and performing women as represented in medieval narrative. The fourth chapter will delve into popular entertainers in medieval narrative, especially as seen in the martial chronicles *The Tale of the Heike* (*Heike monogatari*) and *Yoshitsune: A 15<sup>th</sup> Century Chronicle* (*Gikeiki*). The fifth chapter will be devoted to depictions of the kinship bond between popular entertainers in the Nō theatre, and the coda will take a short look at the recent NHK Taiga drama *Taira no Kiyomori* and the portrayal of late Heian entertainer women that it offers viewers.

## CHAPTER 2

### POPULAR FEMALE ENTERTAINERS IN MEDIEVAL JAPAN: WHO WERE THEY?

#### Entertainers in History

##### *Asobime*

Much of the medieval entertainer's ability to attract patrons came from the fact that many types of entertainers doubled as prostitutes, selling both their performance talents and their bodies. In the Heian period (794-1185), prostitution was legal, unregulated and unattached to any generally-held negative social stigma (Goodwin 3). *Asobime* (lit. “play-women”), or *asobi*, as they are more often labeled, were perhaps the most popular and prolific performer/prostitutes in the early to mid-Heian period. Their true origins are now obscure, and scholars today hotly debate how the *asobi* came to be. One theory posits that they evolved out of the *asobibe*, a lineage of women who acted as morticians for the court and performed songs and incantations to appease the dead (Kim 7). It is also a possibility that the *asobi* profession evolved from, or was inspired by, providers of entertainment for royal banquets called *ukareme*:

The *asobi* trade probably developed as *ukareme* organized into groups, expanded their practice beyond official banquets, settled at specific locations, adopted signature methods and performing practices, and added sexual services as a routine component of their entertainment package (Goodwin 15).

A third theory claims the *asobi*'s evolution from female shamans. Kawashima lists Japanese scholars who support this theory:

Nakayama Tarō...examined the status and practices of prostitutes and concluded that especially in pre-Edo times the position of prostitutes was not always considered lowly and that they had originally been *miko*, or women who served native deities. The controversial scholar Yanagita Kunio also speculated that the *asobi* originated in the *miko* (28).

Though it may never be proven how the *asobi* actually did emerge, the *asobibe*, *ukareme* and *miko* mentioned above all do indeed bear similarity one way or another to the *asobi* and their way of life. None of the three theoretical groups of origin are implausible or farfetched.

*Asobi* generally lived in hierarchical groups, led by a group leader referred to as a *chōja*. She would handle any official business conducted between the government and her own 'family' of women and regulate affairs within the group as well (Goodwin 34). *Asobi* had a tendency to set up their establishments near high-traffic areas: river ports, pilgrimage shrines, and along main roads, where they were most likely to encounter travelers looking for a good time and a good rest. Their main method of entertaining patrons was singing *imayō*, and the tactic they were known to use most often in order to entice patrons was to ride a small pleasure boat, on which they could row up next to neighboring boats that might be laden with potential customers. One example of this behavior is recorded in the Heian period *Sarashina nikki* (a diary written in the eleventh century by a provincial governor's daughter):

Late on the night that we stayed at Takahama [on the Yodo River], I heard the sound of a skiff being poled through the darkness. Someone said that *asobi* were approaching.

Everyone perked up and we had the women pull alongside us. A torch glowing in the distance revealed the *asobi*, wearing simple unlined robes with trailing sleeves and concealing their faces behind their fans as they sang. It was very touching (Goodwin 18).

*Asobi* were often patronized by both upper class men and women; while men would often indulge in the *asobi*'s feminine charms, the *imayō* that the entertainers sang was enjoyable to listen to for both sexes. Faure writes that, "The voices of the *yūjo* of Eguchi were said to "make the body shiver," as though they effected a kind of catharsis" (267). *Asobi* were not unseen at court either. Go-Shirakawa, for example, had many *imayō* concerts performed in his palace by *asobi*, and he even married one by the name of Tanba no Tsubone (Kim 17; 11). *Asobi* were especially important in literary history because of their inclusion in several court-commissioned poetry compilations, such as the *Shinkokinshū* ("A New Collection of Ancient and Modern Japanese Poetry"; 1205). Further, *asobi* are suspected to have written many of the surviving *imayō* recorded in medieval texts (Kim 16). Inevitably, the *asobime* gradually faded out as the most prevalent entertainers when the seat of government changed from west to east with the rise of the Kamakura shogunate. This shift resulted in changes in the most travelled highway routes from ones *asobi* populated to ones they did not, severely cutting down on their customer base (Kim 16). The age of the warrior ushered in many new paradigms, the domain of entertainment included.

### ***Shirabyōshi***

*Asobi* by no means completely disappeared with the end of the Heian period, but the late Heian to the mid-Kamakura was the *shirabyōshi*'s domain. These reportedly dynamic performers, like the *asobi*, regaled patrons with *imayō* but also added a type of dance that incorporated stamping into their entertainment repertoire, possibly explaining why they were called

*shirabyōshi* (lit. “white rhythm”). O'Neill considers this a possibility, saying the name, "probably arose because the accompaniment to the dances used a 'plain, ordinary beat' like that called *shirabyōshi* in Buddhist chanting" (44). The way a *shirabyōshi* performed was a leap forward in complexity from solely singing *imayō*. According to a *shirabyōshi* performance outline written in a short volume from 1465 titled *Imayō no sho* (“Book of Imayō”), a full performance allegedly consisted of several stages. The stages are recorded thus:

1. Singing and dancing the *shirabyōshi*
2. Dancing with open fan
3. Sing[ing] connected songs
4. Extension performance
5. The orally transmitted part
6. Sketch of the *shirabyōshi* dance
7. Playing the drum (Strippoli 46-47).

The reliability of this document is questionable due to its late date of composition, well past the heyday of the *shirabyōshi* profession, which peaked in the early 1200s. However, *Imayō no sho* is perhaps the only document in existence which gives a full overview of a *shirabyōshi* performance. O'Neill elaborates on the seven performance segments listed above, “[*Shirabyōshi* performances] generally consisted of an introductory song, followed by other songs of various types accompanying a dance. This was sometimes a lengthy affair lasting an hour or more and was in two parts, the second in a quick tempo marked by stamping” (46). The longer performances *shirabyōshi* could offer patrons may be one reason they became more popular than *asobi*.

Accounts of the origins of *shirabyōshi* vary, but the existence of several surviving origin stories is an indication that the rise of the *shirabyōshi* profession was a notable phenomenon, standing in contrast to the relative absence of explanations for the historical appearance of *asobi*. An account jotted down by Yoshida Kenkō (1283?-1350?), the author of the famous *Tsurezuregusa* ("Essays in Idleness"), claims that, according to the court musician Ō no Hisasuke (1214-1285), Buddhist laypriest Fujiwara no Michinori (1106-1160):

Selected the most interesting dance steps and taught a woman called Iso no Zenji to perform them. She appeared in a white cloak with a dagger at her side and a man's hat on her head; that is why her dances were known as 'men's dances'. This is the origin of the *shirabyōshi*, women performers who sang stories about the Buddhas and the gods (Yoshida 185).

Because Kenkō and the court musician he cites as his source of information are both believed to have been born in the thirteenth century, at least fifty years after the first *shirabyōshi* appeared, the information is not very credible.

Nestled in the "Giō" episode of the Kakuichi version of the *Tale of the Heike* (1371) is a different story describing the origins of *shirabyōshi*:

Now, the first *shirabyōshi* dances in our country were performed during the reign of Emperor Toba [1103-1156] by two women called Shima-no-senzai and Waka-no-mai. In the beginning, the dancers dressed in men's *suikan* overshirts and high caps and wore daggers with silver-decorated hilts and scabbards: their performances were thus called "male dancing." In more recent times, they have worn only the overshirts, dispensing

with the cap and dagger. The name *shirabyōshi* comes from the color of the overshirts (*Heike* 30).

Despite the discrepancies in origin stories, all of which seem to come from the fourteenth century, a time when the true origination of *shirabyōshi* had most likely become obscure, there are notable similarities between the two accounts cited here. According to both Kenkō's report and the "Giō" episode in *The Tale of the Heike*, as well as many other medieval accounts of *shirabyōshi*, the most notable thing about them was their style of dress, which is almost always brought up as an oddity when explaining these women. As was stated, *shirabyōshi* dressed in the style of men, a form of dress for women entertainers that was probably particularly alluring to the warriors who were in power at the time due to the fact that the costume mimicked that of a warrior's own, complete with sword at hip. The costume consisted of several parts that were likely mixed and matched through the years, possibly based on the performer's personal preference or her patron's. O'Neill names the various items that make up a *shirabyōshi* costume:

The main robe in this was a white top-garment known as a *suikan* [robe]. Long wide trousers (*hakama*), an upright type of ceremonial hat (*eboshi*), and a short sword were also liable to be worn in some periods. An early sixteenth-century illustration of a *shirabyōshi* dancer shows her sitting with a fan in her hand and a drum by her side. Other records amply bear out the obvious conclusions from this, namely, that the performer carried a fan while dancing and that the drum was the main instrument (O'Neill 44).

There was a sexual side to the *shirabyōshi* profession as well, pandering to a man's lust remaining a reliable way to entice him into patronage. Many powerful warriors and nobles, such as the famed general Minamoto no Yoshitsune and Retired Emperor Go-Toba, took *shirabyōshi*



as wives or concubines, and the decisions these powerful men made could often be influenced by their *shirabyōshi* lovers. In Go-Toba's case, a *shirabyōshi* named Kamegiku famously upset the Kamakura government when he allotted her a grand estate. Goodwin writes:

In the Kamakura Period, the retired sovereign Go-Toba (1180-1239; r. 1183-1198) was particularly fond of *shirabyōshi* dancing, inviting performers to entertain him at his palace or when he went out on excursions. Several *shirabyōshi* became Go-Toba's concubines. One pretext for the Jōkyū uprising of 1221, in fact, was *bakufu* anger at the retired sovereign when he took the rights to income from two estates from their warrior holders and gave them to his *shirabyōshi* concubine Kamegiku (29).

Strippoli offers additional information:

Kamegiku received [a] court title...and was showered with donations and benefits, which triggered negative criticism. It is recounted that [Kamegiku], who competed with the *bakufu* for the control of her properties, had a role in the revolt known as [the Jōkyū uprising]. Through this revolt Gotoba attempted to restore imperial power to the *bakufu*. The revolt was quickly suffocated and the retired emperor exiled to Okishima, in the Sea of Japan. Kamegiku followed him and stayed with him until the end (38).

Through these accounts of Go-Toba bestowing excessive favor on Kamegiku, we see one example of the strong influence *shirabyōshi* at court could, and did, have on political figures.

One might be given to wonder, then, whether or not there were restrictions on *shirabyōshi* at court. It appears that a group structure akin to that of the *asobi* was not a major part of a *shirabyōshi*'s professional career, if such a structure existed at all. Many *shirabyōshi* were itinerant, coming and going as they pleased to whomever was able to pay for their services

(Goodwin 134). However, Fujiwara no Teika's diary *Meigetsuki* ("Record of the Clear Moon", 1180-1235) includes a passage mentioning a position at court identified as the *shirabyoshi bugyōnin* (supervisor), who apparently handled certain dealings with this type of entertainer on behalf of the court. As for organization outside court, Goodwin, in her research on the medieval Japanese sex trade, argues that certain legal documents from the Kamakura period provide evidence that some *shirabyōshi* were, at least at one point, involved in troupes or organizations managed by men (unlike the female *chōja* who headed groups of *asobi*). The two documents in question are dated 1256 and deal with a man named Ishikuma Tarō, who seems to have been a moneylender based in the capital who had several financial dealings with *shirabyōshi*. Goodwin explains:

[The first] document records payment of interest on loans of a hundred *mon* each to a man named Ishikawa and to two women whose names – Enmyō Gozen and Enjū Gozen – identify them as *shirabyōshi*...The second document is the deposition of the *shirabyōshi* Tamaō, which relates that Ishikuma Tarō...purchased the indenture of Tokuishime.

Wakita Haruko suggests that Ishikuma used the proceeds from moneylending to finance such purchases (128).

Tokuishime was a woman, possibly an entertainer, who was indentured "as security for a loan to her foster parent" (Goodwin 122). Tamaō's role as a guarantor on Tokuishime's contract, which was sold to Ishikuma, and the connection between Ishikuma and the two *shirabyōshi*, Enmyō Gozen and Enjū Gozen, are seen by Goodwin as evidence that "Ishikuma had business dealings with *shirabyōshi* and may have managed a *shirabyōshi* troupe that performed in the capital, to which he hoped to add provincial entertainers – one of whom could have been Tokuishime" (128). Further evidence for the organization of *shirabyōshi* into groups is lacking in the historical

record, but these two legal documents do illustrate some possibility that *shirabyōshi* were able to be organized into groups like the *asobi* were, albeit headed by males instead of females.

*Shirabyōshi* were extremely popular from their rise in the late Heian to their decline in the late Kamakura. However, *shirabyōshi*, like the *asobi* before them, eventually largely disappeared from historical record around the end of the Kamakura period (1333). They were to be replaced by a new style of performer, similar to the *shirabyōshi* in dress, yet very different in performance.

### ***Kusemai***

The beginning of the Muromachi period (1333-1600) also saw the beginning of a new style of entertainment called *kusemai* (lit. “unconventional dances”). *Kusemai* performers bore a few similarities to *shirabyōshi*, such as the wearing of the male costume, which was very much the same except apparently lacking the short sword. The differences between the two, though, are perhaps more pronounced. *Kusemai* dancers emphasized an even more dynamic style of stomping, and they chanted or sang longer songs with more of a narrative structure than the *imayō* had. Unlike both *asobi* and *shirabyōshi*, it seems most *kusemai* performers were adult males and boys. Yet another dissimilarity between *shirabyōshi* and *kusemai* is the method of the art's perpetuation. Women could become *shirabyōshi* by inheriting the profession from their mothers, but there is no evidence that the art of the *shirabyōshi* was necessarily organized into any sort of linear descent structure like *kusemai*. In fact, according to the well-known Nō actor and playwright Zeami (1363?-1443?), there were five “true” lines of *kusemai*, but by 1430 only one remained: the only all-female troupe, the Kaga line based in Nara, which was said to have originated from a woman with the name Hyakuman (O’Neill 46). It is possible that the female troupe survived while the male lines died out because watching females perform was more

appealing to patrons of the time than watching males, though any focus on sexuality *kusemai* performers might have had is not prominent in the few sources dealing with them that are still extant today. It can most likely be assumed, though, thanks to historical trends, that entertainers of the Muromachi period were liable to be sexually involved with their patrons.

Medieval opinions on *kusemai* varied widely from person to person. For example, the retired emperor Go-Komatsu (1377-1433), after watching a *kusemai* dance, is recorded as saying that "it [is] the music of an age of turmoil" (O'Neill 43). On the other end of the spectrum, though, *kusemai* was very influential to certain wildly popular entertainment groups at the time, especially *sarugaku* ("monkey music," which began as an eclectic performance of acrobatics and comedy), a form of entertainment of which Zeami and his father Kan'ami (1333-1384) were major proponents. According to O'Neill, by the eighth century *sarugaku* was well established in Japan as an entertainment both commoners and nobles enjoyed (2). However, by the early Muromachi period, *sarugaku* had begun to focus almost completely on dramatic and comedic plays, Nō and Kyōgen respectively, which were very popular with 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> century audiences. Through many influences, including the incorporation of a form of *kusemai*, the Nō and Kyōgen of the Muromachi period would eventually become the Nō and Kyōgen performed today. Thanks to the dynamic style of *kusemai*, Kan'ami decided to study under one of the Kaga *kusemai* performers, Otozuru, with the intent to mix *kusemai* into *sarugaku*. Kan'ami's adoption of *kusemai* into his Yamato *sarugaku* troupe involved softening or altering slightly the vocals used in original versions of *kusemai* by blending them with the singing style that *sarugaku* mainly used called *kouta* ("little song"); the *kusemai-kouta* hybrid was then utilized in the pieces the troupe performed (O'Neill 55). What this all led up to was the gradual merger of *kusemai* elements into the music of Nō. "With music being so important that Zeami could describe it as

'the very basis of Nō'," O'Neill writes, "the popularity of the new style which followed the use of Kusemai by Kan-ami must have been a major factor in the victory of the Yamato schools over their Dengaku and Sarugaku rivals and in their survival to the present day" (58). Therefore, though all five lines of *kusemai* performers have now died out, *kusemai* as a style of music has attained a sort of enduring life through Nō performances.

### ***Asobi*: Exhibitions of Solidarity and Divinity**

I would now like to take a more in-depth look at *asobi*, one of the prototypical popular Japanese entertainers, in regard to their relationships with each other and with other women as expressed within *imayō* verses and a *setsuwa* (short tale) written in the thirteenth century. I will also briefly analyze the historical association with the divine that *asobi* and other popular entertainers enjoyed, a connection that allowed entertainers of the Heian and medieval periods a measure of power, which helped them to attract patrons and transcend the boundaries of the normal social order.

The *asobi* are some of the very first recorded proponents of both the sex and entertainment trades in Japan. However, they were also some of the first true outliers of Japanese society. They did not usually own or cultivate land or pay taxes to the government, as nearly everyone else did under the *ritsuryō* system, nor were they inherently branded 'unclean' like the *hinin* ("non-humans" – people who did 'unclean' jobs such as corpse disposal). Due to this factor, there is evidence that *asobi*, women who were arguably in a societal category of their own, who shared a profession and banded together to ply their trade, also shared special relationships with each other. It is conceivable that the *asobi*, as well as the popular entertainers who appeared in later centuries, were portrayed as liable to turn to other women for companionship because of the entertainer's lack of normative relationships with men. Entertainers, being women of pleasure,

did not often settle down with a husband or raise a family, so their emotional support had to come from somewhere else. Keeping this in mind, it is not difficult to see why female entertainers are frequently written as women who look out for and forge bonds with their fellows.

Some evidence of camaraderie between entertainers and other women comes from the *imayō* the *asobi* sang. Because the *imayō*'s purpose was twofold – to attract customers as well as to entertain those who listened to the songs – it is believed that the *asobi* themselves wrote many *imayō*. In form, *imayō* were similar to the five-line *waka* (traditional Japanese poetry) which was popular at court during the Heian period. However, while *waka* followed a strict 5-7-5-7-7 syllable verse pattern, *imayō* were free to be either longer or shorter, though many still adhered closely to the *waka* format. The contents of *waka*, as well, were restricted to conventional words and imagery, but subjects in *imayō*, reflecting the songs' more common origins, ranged from the Lotus Sutra to the lice on someone's head. Musically, though, *imayō* probably emulated *kagurauta*, religious songs derived from folk songs.<sup>2</sup>

Several *imayō* that might have been produced by *asobi* revolve around attraction to men or sexuality in general, and can be candid or humorous. There are a few, though, that seem to be written by those in the sex trade for those in the sex trade. *Ryōjin hishō* song #451 is one of them, and it reads: "In the fields of spring, you're a young bracken plant ready for life, but stand quiet, don't be plucked by some vulgar knave!" (Kim 124).<sup>3</sup> Yung-hee Kim, who wrote extensively on the *imayō* compiled in the book *Ryōjin hishō*, has this to say about #451: "Sometimes *Ryōjin hishō* songs are about young girls or courtesans inexperienced in male-female relationships, and so provide words of warning. Here, the image of an early spring bracken hints at affection on the

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<sup>2</sup> For further information on the form and content of *imayō*, refer to Kim, *Songs to Make the Dust Dance: The Ryōjin hishō of Twelfth-Century Japan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994).

<sup>3</sup> Original *imayō*: *Haru no no ni / koya kaitaru yō nite / tsuitateru kagiwarabi / shinobite tatere / gesu ni toraru na* (Kim 124).

part of [the] speaker for the young woman” (124). Another song that might be providing through analogy a warning or a simple lamentation for a fellow woman is *Ryōjin hishō* #475, which reads in translation: "In the Yodo's depths the sweetfish baby squeaks, pierced by the cormorant's beak from behind. Writhing. How pitiful!" (Kim 118).<sup>4</sup> Song #375, however, does not rely on metaphor at all. "Tokenoboru came down from the capital, built herself a house to live in at Shima. But "he" abandoned her without a second thought. No matter how she prays – Hyaku Dayū – without your miracle, she's headed back for the capital of flowers” (Goodwin 36).<sup>5</sup> The Hyaku Dayū mentioned is the god of *asobi* worship, a god who appears in many *imayō* and secondhand accounts of *asobi*, but also one many scholars writing on the subject of *asobi* tend to avoid explaining in great detail. Kim, however, delves into the topic more extensively, explaining that "Hyakudayū worship was apparently a phallic cult, its object of veneration being representations of the male sexual organ made of wood, paper or stone...The powerful appeal of the Hyakudayū worship to *asobi* is evidenced in *Yūjoki* ["An Account of *Yūjo*", written by the nobleman Ōe no Masafusa in 1087], which notes that *asobi* kept hundreds and even thousands of these objects" (9).<sup>6</sup> The song about Tokenoboru needing a miracle from Hyaku Dayū, therefore, was possibly written by an *asobi* who was feeling sorry for the girl who had staked all her hopes on a fickle-hearted man.

Another example of *asobi* showing compassion towards other women, this time written by someone who was not a performing woman, can be seen in a *setsuwa* titled “Two Whose Hearts Were Free of Envy.” *Setsuwa* are short stories written in the Heian and medieval periods; in this case, the *setsuwa* is a Buddhist didactic tale written by Mujū Ichien (1226-1312). Mujū

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<sup>4</sup> Original *imayō*: *Yodogawa no / soko no fukaki ni / ayu no ko no / u to iu tori ni / senaka kuwarete / kirikiri meku / itōshi ya* (Kim 118).

<sup>5</sup> Original *imayō*: *Miyako yori kudarishi / tokenoboru / shima ni ya tatete sumishikado / somo shirazu uchisutete / ikani matsureba hyakudayū / gen nakute hana no miyako e / kaesuran* (Kim 10).

<sup>6</sup> 遊女 can be read ‘*asobime*’ or ‘*yūjo*’. *Yūjo* was often used as a catch-all term for entertainer women.

was a devout Buddhist priest who compiled many such stories into a five volume work called *Shasekishū* ("Sand & Pebbles"), completed in 1283. The tale involves two women, an *asobi* and a man's wife, and it extolls the virtue of being tolerant of others, as Mujū himself is said to have been (Morrell 19). *Asobi* would have still been active, albeit in the process of dying out, at the time of Mujū's writing. The *setsuwa* is quoted in its entirety here:

A nobleman went down to his estate in the country, and, on returning to the capital accompanied by a courtesan [*asobi*], sent a messenger ahead to notify his wife. "I am returning with someone. Since she will be made uncomfortable by your presence, please leave." Even after having been addressed so cruelly, the woman did not show the least sign of bitterness. "The master is returning with another woman. Prepare for her arrival," she announced, giving detailed instructions. She removed everything that might prove embarrassing; then, after seeing that every last detail was suitably taken care of, the wife withdrew.

On being apprised of what had happened, the courtesan was dumbfounded and spoke to the nobleman. "Your wife's behavior reveals a most gracious disposition, as I have been informed. Having seen what she has done, how could I live here in her place? I would surely forfeit the divine protection. So call your wife back as before, and provide me with other accommodations where you can visit me from time to time. That will be all right. Otherwise, how could I stay here for even one day?"

After the courtesan repeatedly sent the nobleman written pledges in support of the wife, the nobleman bowed to reason. Recalling his wife's unusual generosity, he sent a messenger to bring her back. At first he received no reply, but after repeated appeals, she returned to live with him. The courtesan being also a person of sensitivity, the two



women shared each other's company and were inseparable. Their attitude is unprecedented (Morrell 196-197).

The story's moral seems to be aimed at encouraging people, especially women, to let go of their jealous hearts and implies that good things will come of such good behavior. What is notable about this story is that it is the only one of several other closely-grouped infidelity-themed stories in Mujū's *setsuwa* collection to include an entertainer as a character; it is also the only story in the collection with the infidelity theme to end in companionship between the concubine and the jilted wife, suggesting a possible predisposition on Mujū's part to consider *asobi* as women inclined to feel compassion for their fellow women.

The *asobi* says she will "surely forfeit the divine protection" if she takes precedence over the man's proper wife. Rather than anything connected with Buddhism, this could be an allusion to the supposed shamanic origins of *asobi*. Even if *asobi* did not truly derive from shamans, there was still a connection between the two. In premodern Japan, owing to a certain myth, entertainment through song or dance was established as a way to communicate with the gods. The myth in question is from the *Kojiki* ("Record of Ancient Matters", written in the eighth century). It relates the tale of Amaterasu, the sun goddess, who had shut herself up in a cave. She was eventually lured out of hiding by the alluring song and dance of a female shaman, Ameno uzume no Mikoto. *Asobi*, who made a living doing much the same thing – that is, enticing patrons by singing alluringly – were probably then an obvious parallel to Ameno. Kim notes that, "...the [female shaman's] professional performances...could easily be perceived as erotic; it was a short step from there to secular entertainment" (6).

What is just as likely for an author of the 13<sup>th</sup> century to be doing by mentioning divine protection, though, is alluding to the *asobi* as singers of *imayō*. Because of the sacredness of

song and the idea that music and dance served a religious function, *imayō*, being a genre of song, was also thought to serve in a religious capacity. As an example of this, Kim writes, "Each of the six pilgrimage accounts in *Kudenshū* [Go-Shirakawa's memoir] records mystical revelations encountered on Go-Shirakawa's journeys" (34). The revelations Go-Shirakawa describes in *Kudenshū* usually revolve around Go-Shirakawa or one of his entourage singing an *imayō* and being blessed by a sign from the gods. One of the accounts in *Kudenshū* relates an incident in which Go-Shirakawa began singing a Buddhist-themed *imayō* in a temple while on a pilgrimage. He sang the song multiple times, after which a priest of the temple rushed in, claiming he had heard an eerie voice from the very top of a tall pine tree, a voice assumedly belonging to a deity who was attracted by the *imayō* (Kim 35).<sup>7</sup> Further, Go-Shirakawa is quoted as writing:

The *imayō* that are popular these days are not intended simply for entertainment. When they are sung with sincerity at shrines and temples, they bring about divine revelations and fulfill our wishes. They obtain for people their desire for official positions, prolong human life, and immediately cure illnesses (Faure 257).

It was most likely thanks to Go-Shirakawa's avid patronage of the art form and his compilation of *Ryōjin hishō* that the popularity of *imayō* at court skyrocketed during the twelfth century (Kim 4).

*Imayō* also benefited because of its verse form and its derivation from *waka*. Mid-Heian-period *waka* composers felt the need to "achieve a harmonious relationship between their literary activity and Buddhist religious concepts and practices" (Kim 42). Thus they adopted the idea of

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<sup>7</sup> The *imayō* Go-Shirakawa sang (RH #39): "Far above the vows of ten thousand buddhas, trustworthy the vows of Thousand-armed Kannon; even withered grass and trees, so it is said, blossom and bear fruit in a moment" (Kim 35). Original *imayō*: *Yorozu no hotoke no gan yori mo / senju no chikai zo tanomoshiki / karetaru kusaki mo tachimachi ni / hanasaki minaru to toitamau* (Kim 74).

*kyōgen kigyō* (translated by Kim as “delusive words and decorative language”):

A phrase coined by the T’ang poet Po Chū-i (772-846): “My aspiration is that the karma wrought by my secular literary work in the present life, with its delusive words and decorative language, becomes for future worlds a medium of praising the Dharma and a cause for propagating the Buddha’s teaching” (Kim 42).

This attempt to associate poetry with Buddhism, to essentially create a “Way of Poetry,” was met with both welcome and disdain from different parties in the Heian and medieval periods.

However, the split viewpoints on the subject of *kyōgen kigyō* paralleled the differing viewpoints on women, especially those who, like the *asobi*, flaunted their sexuality. Pandey points out:

[Poetry] was at once seen as a sin because it engaged in the use of ‘wild words and frivolous phrases’ (*kyōgen kigyō*) which were considered false or untrue, and, at the same time, came to be justified as a profoundly religious practice. Equally, the Buddhist paradigm shaped both arguments which represented women as impure beings tied to their sexual bodies and hence incapable of attaining enlightenment in their own bodies, as well as counter-arguments which claimed that women were sacred because of their engagement with sex rather than despite it (62).

Connecting the sexual to the sacred by means of artistic effort was yet another concept that developed in the Heian period due to the courtier’s way of life. According to Pandey:

The aristocratic world of Heian Japan demanded that sexual activities go hand in hand with the cultivation of music and poetry and other artistic pursuits...The skill and

sensitivity required to perform well as poets and musicians was seen as a reflection of a concomitant skill and sensitivity in conducting amorous affairs (66).

Some clearly felt that art forms expressing *kyōgen kigyo*, such as *imayō*, were a hindrance to the Buddhist way. However, *imayō* fit perfectly well into the idea of the “Way of Poetry,” and because of the *imayō*’s link to the sacred, those who sang *imayō* were supposed to have been able to connect to the gods in some way. Because of this, entertainers such as *asobi* and, later, *shirabyōshi*, were often respected for their connection with the divine. *Shirabyōshi* in particular, because they danced and sang *imayō*, were often chosen to perform in sacred rituals (we will see an example of this in Chapter 4) (Goodwin 98). Through this connection, both *asobi* and *shirabyōshi* were able to hold a measure of power and respect in society as women who were in touch with the sacred. The idea of the “Way of Poetry” as inclusive of *imayō* is further explained by Faure:

The sacralization of the *imayō* (and of the *asobi* who specialized in them) was part of a broader trend, which led to the belief that Japanese poetry was the principal vehicle of expression of the gods. Thus, despite the Buddhist warning against “wild words and specious phrases” (*kyōgen kigyo*), medieval Japanese came to believe that the main poetic form of the time, the *waka*, were none other than *dhāranī* – the true utterances of the buddhas (255).

From his writings, we know that Mujū was also an avid follower of the “Way of Poetry” as a religious idea. He once wrote:

Japanese poems do not differ from the words of the Buddha. The *dhāranī* of India are simply the words used by the people of that country which the Buddha took and

interpreted as mystic formulas. ...Had the Buddha appeared in Japan, he would simply have used Japanese for mystic verses... (Morrell 63).

As a Buddhist priest who believed strongly in the power of verse, Mujū would likely have been inclined to look fondly on *imayō*, particularly the songs dealing with religious topics, as a way to educate the masses about Buddhism and spirituality. Therefore, Mujū may have included the *asobi*'s "divine protection" in the *setsuwa* as a reference to the closeness to the gods that singers of *imayō* represented.

Go-Shirakawa's great influence on *imayō*, however, is a strong indicator of just how important it was for entertainers like *asobi*, *shirabyōshi*, and *kusemai* to catch the attention of powerful patrons. Through a powerful patron, an entertainer's name and craft could become famous throughout Japan. Now, I will attempt to illustrate the importance of patronage to entertainer women and highlight some differences between women who performed and noblewomen who lived at court.

## CHAPTER 3

### PATTERNS OF PATRONAGE: EMPERORS AND WARRIORS

#### The Importance of Patronage: How to Get It, How to Lose It

*Asobi*, *shirabyōshi*, and other female entertainers active during the late Heian, Kamakura, and Muromachi periods, came from varied backgrounds and mingled with commoners and nobles alike. Among this diverse group, individual historical records survive only for those entertainers known in connection with prominent patrons. The more famous and affluent the patron, the more likely it was that his preferred entertainer would be able to stake out a place in history as a well-known figure herself. Therefore, the names of entertainers who were under the patronage of emperors or prominent warriors are the names that are still heard today. Other women who did not receive the favor of powerful men faded into obscurity or anonymity. Several implications can be drawn from the fact that the existence of any one entertainer was frequently recorded only in connection to her patron. For one thing, the medieval female entertainers whose names have stood the test of time are very few. For this reason, contemporary scholars have less to work with on the subject of these entertainers than if female entertainers had been better able to stand on their own as persons of interest to medieval writers. Another implication is that, because securing patronage constituted an important part of these women's livelihoods, many rivalries as well as mutually empathetic partnerships between performing

women were engendered. I will explore some salient examples of the interrelatedness of these performers in Chapters 4 and 5.

For a performing woman, finding a patron who could support her was pivotal, but how did a performer go about securing patronage from someone of high rank? Moreover, what kind of relationships between performing women could develop as they competed for patrons or were mistreated by them? A story from *The Tale of the Heike*, titled “Giō,” illustrates fictional, yet credible, examples of the search for a patron and the birth of a complex relationship between entertainers. The story presents the leader of the prestigious Heike clan, Taira no Kiyomori (1118-1181), as an avid patron of *shirabyōshi*. He is certainly a well-to-do patron, being both a renowned warrior as well as a man rising steadily in power at court – someone “with the whole country in the palm of his hand” (*Heike* 30). Kiyomori keeps one *shirabyōshi*, Giō, as his favored companion, and her high status inspires other *shirabyōshi* to hopeful acts of emulation, such as changing their names to include part of hers:

News of Giō’s good fortune made some of the *shirabyōshi* in the capital envious and others spiteful. The envious ones said, “Lucky Giō! What entertainer wouldn’t want to be exactly like her? It must be because she has used ‘Gi’ in her name; I’ll do that, too.” One called herself Giichi, another Gini, another Gifuku, another Gitoku, and so forth. The many spiteful ones kept their own names. “What difference could a name or part of a name make?” they sniffed. “Good fortune is something a person is born with from a previous existence” (*Heike* 30).

This passage illuminates one tactic an entertainer felt she could use to gain an edge over her fellows as well as the jealousies that could mar harmonious relations among entertainers.

According to the *Heike* narrative, the envious *shirabyōshi* were attempting to ride the wave of

Giō's celebrity and garner attention to themselves by using part of her name in their own. It seems that they even believed that such a change would bring about the same lucky break that Giō had had. The spiteful *shirabyōshi* merely saw Giō as a rival who had become successful, not by her own talents, but because of the inner workings of Buddhist karma.

According to "Giō," changing a name for increased luck and visibility was not the only tactic to secure patronage available to a medieval entertainer. A young and talented *shirabyōshi* named Hotoke decided to show up one day at Kiyomori's door and asked to be allowed to perform for him, hoping to gain his approval. To simply walk up and request an audience with a potential patron is mentioned by Giō to be "quite the usual thing" for an entertainer, marking such a brash and open attempt to secure patronage as another strategy readily available to entertainers. Though it is never explained in depth how Giō herself came to be Kiyomori's favorite, she and her sister are introduced as "two famous and accomplished *shirabyōshi* performers...Kiyomori took an extravagant fancy to the older one, Giō; and the younger, Ginyo, found herself a popular favorite as a result" (*Heike* 30). This indicates that Giō's fame was, in fact, established by her skillfulness even before she came under Kiyomori's patronage, and this was likely how she attracted his attention in the first place.

One may well imagine that an entertainer's skill and reputation in her trade was an important factor in the eyes of a potential patron. Much like the fictional Giō being chosen by Kiyomori for her accomplishments, it is historically attested that a female performer named Otomae, known as "the undisputed authority in *imayō*," was chosen by Retired Emperor Go-Shirakawa as his *imayō* teacher. His choice of Otomae was motivated by her thorough



grounding in the song style and celebrity as a *kugutsu* (Kim 19).<sup>8</sup> As far as Otomae's effect on her pupil, it is believed that Otomae was the performer who taught Go-Shirakawa many of the *imayō* that are recorded in *Ryōjin hishō*, and he managed to become a somewhat successful heir to her song style, eventually passing the style down to two of his own disciples (Kim 21). According to Kim, no factor except Otomae's reputation as a specialist in her field caused her to gain the attention of the powerful Retired Emperor.

There were clearly several different ways to gain patronage as an entertainer, but how did an entertainer normally lose patronage? Again, "Giō" offers some examples: When Hotoke comes to Taira no Kiyomori's door and he receives her, he is charmed by her beauty and talent, and Hotoke ends up replacing Giō as Kiyomori's favorite *shirabyōshi* by his own decree that Hotoke stay and Giō leave. Giō is cast out, her patronage revoked. The fickle heart of a man like Kiyomori was, most likely, quite often the end of a patron-entertainer relationship, especially because many entertainers were kept both as concubines as well as for their artistic skills. The replacement of Giō by Hotoke instigated what is almost certainly the most famous rivalry between two medieval performer women; however, their feelings of rivalry end up becoming the most famous bond of solidarity between two performer women. Their solidarity is assured once Hotoke voluntarily leaves Kiyomori's service due to her feelings of guilt over usurping Giō's place. Giō and Hotoke are, in part, brought together through their mutual acknowledgment of their former patron's capricious and insensitive nature.

Another way an entertainer could lose her patron is if that patron were exiled or otherwise fell into disfavor in the eyes of the authorities. This happened to Shizuka, the *shirabyōshi* concubine of Minamoto no Yoshitsune. Yoshitsune was a celebrated warrior of the

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<sup>8</sup> *Kugutsu* were eclectic, mainly nomadic people who made their living performing various arts, such as puppetry, magic and music. Like the *asobi*, they were known for attracting patrons with *imayō*. For more information, see Kim 13-17.

Genji clan who had won several decisive battles against the Heike during the Genpei War (1180-1185). Though Yoshitsune's half-brother, Minamoto no Yoritomo, became the first shogun due to Yoshitsune's numerous victories, Yoritomo turned on his brother and became mistrustful of him. Yoritomo's troops forced Yoshitsune to flee to northern Japan, where he was trapped into taking his own life. During Yoshitsune's long flight, Shizuka was left behind to fend for herself, enduring much hardship. In the end, Shizuka falls back on another *shirabyōshi*, her mother's, care and protection. During the rest of her short and turbulent life, her major sources of comfort were the words and deeds of her mother and the other women around her, especially Hōjō Masako, Yoritomo's wife.

To sum up, securing patronage was a necessity for medieval entertainers who wanted to live well and be recognized by their peers and by elite social circles. The only way an entertainer could really make her mark on history or popular narrative was by being associated with a powerful patron such as Taira no Kiyomori or Retired Emperor Go-Shirakawa. There were many ways for an entertainer woman to come into patronage, including making a name for herself among the common populace, directly introducing herself to a patron, or riding the newest trend and hoping it would take her somewhere like the envious *shirabyōshi* in "Giō" did when they took parts of her name as their own.

As many ways as there were to gain patronage, though, there were just as many ways to lose it, including expulsion from service, voluntary withdrawal from service, or one's patron becoming a wanted man. If medieval narratives are to be believed, often when a performer gained a desirable patron, it would spark rivalries, good-natured or not, among her and her fellows. However, when a performer lost a patron, she would commonly seek comfort from those same fellows.

Not all women in the medieval period were regularly depicted as forging bonds with each other though. Certainly, the divide between the noblewoman at court and the entertainer was often quite pronounced in medieval Japanese literature, most specifically in the *Tale of the Heike*, wherein both types of women are prominently featured. While entertainers display solidarity and a willingness to rely on each other, court women mainly keep to themselves, even if they would be benefitted by a close friendship with another. Let us now take a brief look at how noblewomen and entertainer women were treated differently in the *Tale of the Heike*.

### **The Dividing Line Between Court Women and Professional Entertainers**

The major point of disparity between the entertainers and the court women of *The Tale of the Heike* is that court women such as Kogō and Aoi do not team up to help each other combat the many pains inflicted upon them by their station in life. The episode “Aoi” (6:3), for example, tells the story of a serving girl in the palace, Aoi, whom Emperor Takakura became smitten with. When others in the palace began gossiping about how Aoi may climb the ranks from her low position to become an imperial consort, the Emperor stopped seeing her to avoid a scandal. He gave Aoi a poem expressing his unrequited love for her even though she was of low birth, which upset her so much that she died within a week. Despite her distress being caused by a man, much like the distress Kiyomori caused Giō and Hotoke, Aoi did not turn to female companionship for relief.

Kogō is another pertinent example of a court woman in *The Tale of the Heike* who chooses not to assert herself by forming a sisterhood. The episode “Kogō” (6:4) is directly linked with the “Aoi” episode, taking place right after it. The Empress presents Emperor Takakura with one of her attendants, Kogō, hoping she will be able to take his mind off Aoi. However, Kiyomori quickly scares Kogō away from the palace when he learns of the Emperor’s interest in

her. Kiyomori reasons that the Emperor's trysts might put Kiyomori's daughter, the Empress's, position in jeopardy. Kogō flees to a house far from the palace, but is soon located by a courier who was sent by the Emperor to look for her. She is escorted back to the palace in secret, where Emperor Takakura hides her until she gives birth to an empress. Kiyomori learns of Kogō's return to the palace and forces her to become a nun, driving her off into exile, where she stays.

Kogō, too, is not depicted as seeking company or help from anyone. There is no mutual bond that forms between her and another woman with whom she can commiserate. This is a very different state of affairs than when entertainers are involved; though there are plenty of women at the palace, and they interact with each other from time to time, friendship seems an alien concept when portraying court women, at least in *The Tale of the Heike*. The *Tale* depicts court women as if they were expected to tackle every problem in the world by themselves. By contrast, one is hard pressed to find a narrative in which female entertainers *do not* form a kinship bond with each other. This is a puzzling topic beyond the scope of this study, but for now, it will suffice to say that court women were not included in the solidarity trope pertinent to depictions of performing women.

## CHAPTER 4

### FEMALE ENTERTAINER PAIRS IN MEDIEVAL NARRATIVE

The Kakuichi manuscript of *The Tale of the Heike* is a war tale divided into 12 chapters plus an epilogue (“The Initiate’s Chapter”, unique to this version of the *Tale*), with numerous episodes allocated to each chapter. The *Heike* revolves around events leading up to and during the Genpei War (1180-1185), the series of battles between the Genji (Minamoto) and Heike (Taira) warrior clans that culminated in an ultimate win for the Genji and the total destruction of the Heike. The story is roughly divided into thirds: the first part follows the ascension and rise to prosperity of the Heike warrior clan while it was under the leadership of Taira no Kiyomori, whose poor decisions and unexpected death contributed to the clan’s eventual fall from power. The second part describes the Heike fleeing the capital and tells of the actions of Kiso no Yoshinaka, a Genji general who routed the Heike from the capital and was stationed there but who overstepped his position and was eventually killed by his own family. The concluding portion of the story reveals the fate of the Heike clan in the final battles of the war and follows the imprisoned Taira no Shigehira, Kiyomori’s son, around Japan as the Genji decide what to do with him after the Heike have been completely defeated.

The Genpei War began in part because the Heike exceeded their bounds as a warrior clan in service to the imperial house, instead climbing up the ranks and becoming imperials

themselves by marrying into the royal family. The Heike got as far as producing a child, Taira no Kiyomori's grandson Antoku, who was made Emperor. The Genji, who were also in service to the throne, did not appreciate the Heike rise to power, or Kiyomori's successful attempt to place his grandson on the throne as the next Emperor. The Heike were eventually driven out of the capital by the Genji, escaping with the Antoku emperor to a safe haven where the Heike could set up a temporary court. After many bloody battles between the two clans, the Heike were defeated in a sea battle at Dannoura, between Kyushu and Honshu. Prince Antoku and his attendants drowned themselves, and the rest of the Heike were captured or killed.

*The Tale of the Heike* was most likely written down as a history shortly after the events that wrapped up the Genpei War. Butler says of its composition, "In writing this work, the author put together certain existing orally composed tales about the Heike to form the narrative structure, and to this added a great amount of historical fact derived from diaries and other historical records" (6). Later, this text was popularly orally performed by blind, lute-playing monks called *biwa hōshi*, thereby disseminating the *Tale* across Japan and familiarizing the populace with the stories of the Genpei War. The earliest extant version of the *Tale of the Heike* (the Enkei version) is thought to have been composed around 1309 (Strippoli 88).<sup>9</sup> Though many different iterations of the *Tale* are readily available for perusal today (and nearly 100 different versions are thought to have existed at one time or another), the Kakuichi version, composed in 1371 by a *biwa hōshi* named Akashi Kakuichi, is widely considered to be the canonical version of the *Tale* due to several factors. Some of those factors are delineated by Barbara Ruch as follows:

One of Kakuichi's great achievements was to purge earlier, more primitive, versions of the narrative of much of their partisan defense of ancestors and their oppressive

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<sup>9</sup> *Enkei*, along with *Enkyō* and *Engyō*, are all accepted romanizations of the title of this version of the *Tale*.

sermonizing. The Buddhistic themes and motifs that resound in his version give the work a reassuring quality, a serenity and universality. Kakuichi attempts neither to glamorize nor vilify: the great oratorio is on the side of all those who fell and died (37).

Kakuichi's version of the *Tale*, thanks to its universality and easily accessible English translation by Helen McCullough, is the text I will be referencing when exploring the stories of performing women depicted in the *Tale*.<sup>10</sup>

Like many works of medieval Japanese literature, *The Tale of the Heike* is strongly colored by the Buddhist theme of the inherent ephemerality of all things. This theme finds its way not only into the stories of warriors' victories and deaths, but also the narratives that focus on female entertainers. The actions the entertainer women featured in the *Tale* take against the constraints imposed on them by their patrons and by their station as women in a world of men often end up instantiating the work's overarching idea of impermanence. Two pairs of women, Giō and Hotoke in the episode "Giō" (1:6), and Jijū and Yuya in the episode "The Journey Down the Eastern Sea Road" (10:6), exemplify this pattern. Shizuka, a performer who is also mentioned in the *Tale*, does not conform to this pattern as depicted in the *Heike*, but rather in other renderings of her story, such as that found in *Yoshitsune: A 15<sup>th</sup> Century Chronicle*, and other stories from various narratives both specifically and peripherally about her.<sup>11</sup>

## Giō and Hotoke

The *Tale of the Heike* episode titled "Giō" may be the premier example in medieval narrative of an exhibition of solidarity between performing women. The episode is situated in the

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<sup>10</sup> Another full English translation of *The Tale of the Heike* was authored by Hiroshi Kitagawa and Bruce T. Tsuchida (Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press, 1975).

<sup>11</sup> Other works that feature Shizuka's legend include picture dramas (*ehon*), Kabuki theatre, and histories such as *Azuma Kagami* ("Mirror of the East"). For more information, refer to Elizabeth Oyler's article "Tonsuring the Performer: Image, Text and Narrative in the Ballad-Drama Shizuka." *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 36.2 (2009): 295-317.

very first chapter of the *Tale*, where it can most significantly shape the reader's developing judgment of Taira no Kiyomori, the leader of the Heike clan. The episodes surrounding "Giō" deal with the rise of Kiyomori's family to prominence at court, as well as Kiyomori's own rise to power. According to the episode immediately before "Giō," "Kiyomori's Flowering Fortunes" (1:5), "Not only did Kiyomori himself attain the pinnacle of worldly success, but his entire family shared his prosperity" (*Heike* 28). Kiyomori is set up to be a successful warrior/aristocrat who, with the right attitude, could ensure his descendants' fortunes for a long time. However, these episodes do nothing but emphasize the flagrant abuses of power Kiyomori indulges in. "Giō" itself may be the low point of the episodes dealing with Kiyomori in Chapter 1, as it spends many words showing exactly how selfishly and thoughtlessly Kiyomori can act.

As I mentioned in Chapter 3, "Giō" focuses on a *shirabyōshi* of the same name who had caught Taira no Kiyomori's eye and his patronage. He lavishes gifts, money and food on Giō, her sister Ginyo, and her mother Toji, all of whom are *shirabyōshi*. For three years, Giō and her family enjoy Kiyomori's patronage and favor. One day, a young and extremely talented *shirabyōshi* called Hotoke (lit. "Buddha") travels to the capital from her home in Kaga Province and requests an audience with Kiyomori. He coldly denies her, believing Hotoke rude for presenting herself uninvited, and orders her thrown out. In a show of compassion for her fellow entertainer, Giō speaks up on Hotoke's behalf:

It is quite the usual thing for an entertainer to present herself without an invitation. Then, too, they say Hotoke is still very young. It would be cruel to send her home with that harsh dismissal, now that she has ventured to come here. As a dancer myself, I cannot help feeling involved: I would be uncomfortable and sad, too. You would be doing her a great kindness by at least receiving her before sending her away, even if you don't watch



her dance or listen to her sing. Won't you please be a little lenient and call her back to be received? (*Heike* 31).

This show of good faith on Giō's part, however, is turned around 180 degrees when Kiyomori, upon granting Giō's request and allowing Hotoke to perform for him, is so smitten with Hotoke that he decides to take her under his patronage as well. Hotoke is unhappy with this demand, possibly even angered. To show her gratitude to Giō, as well as reciprocal solidarity as a performer, she responds to Kiyomori by saying, "I came here on my own and was thrown out, but then I was recalled through Giō's intercession. If I were to be kept here, it would embarrass me to know what Giō's thoughts would be. Please let me go home right away" (*Heike* 32). Kiyomori, in a display of insensitivity, takes this retort to mean that Giō must be dismissed from his service before Hotoke will be comfortable. Despite Hotoke's further protests, Kiyomori dispatches Giō by sending her three different messengers telling her to leave. Giō resolves to leave, but not before reflecting on the end of her patronage and her life with Kiyomori. With a mind that all things will eventually end, including Kiyomori's enduring patronage of Hotoke, Giō leaves a poem written on a sliding door, which reads, "Since both are grasses of the field, how may either be spared by autumn – the young shoot blossoming forth and the herb fading from view?" (*Heike* 33).<sup>12</sup>

The implications of the poem – the young shoot, Hotoke, and the fading herb, Giō – are not lost on Hotoke, though Giō goes through much more grief and shame before Hotoke finds the courage to act in response to the poem's message. After Giō has been out of Kiyomori's service for some time, Kiyomori calls her back to the capital, heartlessly requesting that she entertain Hotoke, who seems bored. Giō does her best to ignore his summons, but her mother,

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<sup>12</sup> Original poem: *Moeizuru mo / karuru mo onaji / nobe no kusa / izure ka aki ni / awadehatsubeki* (Strippoli 93).

Toji, advises Giō about the fickle nature of relationships between men and women. Toji further argues that Giō's whole family risks banishment by proxy, which would make Giō highly unfilial, and Toji finally gets her to change her mind about appearing. When Giō arrives at Kiyomori's residence, she is miserable about the lowly seat she is directed to, and Hotoke feels much pity for Giō and her bitter tears. When Kiyomori orders Giō to perform an *imayō*, she cleverly chooses one that, by way of lamentation, invokes Hotoke's name and the idea that there is no inherent difference between the two women: "In days of old, the Buddha was but a mortal; in the end, we ourselves will be Buddhas, too. How grievous that distinctions must separate those who are alike in sharing the Buddha-nature" (*Heike* 34).<sup>13</sup> Once again, Giō displays an awareness of the solidarity that ought to exist between performing women and attempts to remind Hotoke of it through their shared medium of entertainment. Predictably, the deeper meaning of the song is lost on Kiyomori, who instructs Giō to become Hotoke's personal entertainer. Giō is so shamed at falling so low that she contemplates suicide as a preferable alternative to the humiliation she would feel by entertaining day in and day out the woman she was replaced by. Ginyo resolves to drown along with Giō, but just as before, Toji talks her daughters out of making a drastically bad decision by reminding Giō that dragging her whole family down into Hell by committing suicide is not very filial. Giō acknowledges that her mother is right, and all three women take vows to become Buddhist nuns, moving to a secluded hermitage to focus on praying for rebirth in Amida's Western Paradise.

The twist of the story comes very near the end, when the nuns hear knocking on the door of their secluded hut. Thinking it to be an evil spirit, they fearfully open the door, only to realize that the visitor is Hotoke, who has also become a nun. Hotoke defends her past actions to Giō by

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<sup>13</sup> Original *imayō*: *Hotoke mo mukashi wa / bonbu nari / warera mot sui ni wa / hotoke nari / izure mo busshō / gu seru mi o / hedatsuru nomi koso / kanashikere* (*Heike* 34).

using the fact that she and Giō are both helpless women to express her side of the story in a way that would strike a chord with Giō:

A woman is a poor, weak thing, incapable of controlling her destiny. I was miserable about being kept there [with Kiyomori]. When you were summoned again to sing the *imayō*, it brought home my own position. I was not in the least happy, because I knew my turn would come some day. I also recognized the truth of the lines you left on the sliding door, ‘How may either be spared by autumn?’ (*Heike* 36).

Hotoke explains how she finally recognized the full truth, that she was the same as Giō and her future would be the same as well, reminding Giō of the poem she left on the screen for Hotoke to see. Hotoke begs Giō to forgive her, “If you say you forgive me, I want to recite Buddha-invocations with you and be reborn on the same lotus pedestal. But if you cannot bring yourself to agree, I will wander away from here – it matters not where – to fall prostrate on a bed of moss or on the roots of a pine tree...” (*Heike* 37). Unselfishly, Hotoke leaves Giō room to refuse to be friendly to her, should Giō not find herself able to accept Hotoke’s apology. For her part, though, Giō is moved to tears by Hotoke’s sudden appearance and devotion to making things right between them. She admits to a burning envy that was impeding her salvation:

I never dreamed that you felt that way. I ought to have been able to accept my unhappiness...but I was always jealous of you. I fear there would have been no rebirth in the Pure Land for me. I seemed stranded half-way, between this world and the next. The change in your appearance has made my resentment vanish like scattering dewdrops; there is no longer any doubt that I will be reborn into the Pure Land (*Heike* 37).

By being truly selfless and willing to give up a successful career in the prime of her life, Hotoke really did become a vehicle of the deity she was named for. In becoming a nun, searching out Giō, and begging her forgiveness, Hotoke enabled Giō to let go of her one remaining worldly attachment, her envy towards Hotoke. In other words, Hotoke acted as the agent that let Giō be reborn in Paradise. The episode ends with a confirmation that the four women “achieved their goal of rebirth in the Pure Land, each in her turn” (*Heike* 37).

Throughout *The Tale of the Heike*, Kiyomori’s tendency to be heartless, cruel and daft probably has something to do with the necessity to vilify him as the leader of the Heike, the clan on the losing side of the Genpei War. Several events in the *Tale* cast Kiyomori in a hard light, such as the time he moved the capital to Fukuvara against the wishes of the rest of the court. Another example would be his employment of several hundred young boys, whom he ordered to go into the city and spy on civilians who might be speaking out against the Heike, in which case the boys were to arrest the guilty civilian and confiscate his belongings. The most pronounced example of Kiyomori’s villainy, however, comes in the episode “The Burning of Nara” (5:14), in which Kiyomori orders an attack on Nara to put down the rebellious monks residing there. Kiyomori’s troops end up burning Tōdaiji temple and its 160-foot tall bronze Buddha statue to the ground, as well as causing the deaths of more than three thousand people. Kiyomori’s evil deeds culminated in the *Heike*’s depiction of Kiyomori’s descent to hell after he dies of a strange illness.

Explaining the Heike clan’s downfall in terms of Kiyomori’s bad decisions and worse karma helped the *Tale of the Heike* to mark a clear antagonist. Especially in “Giō,” Kiyomori as a patron of the arts is portrayed as irresponsible and crude, exactly the sort of patron a savvy performer would want to avoid, despite his riches. He uses performers as playthings, throwing

them aside when he gets bored or finds a better one, rather than treating them as human beings with feelings, wants and needs. On top of this, he willfully ignores Hotoke's pleas to spare Giō's feelings, and instead goes so far as to summon Giō to entertain Hotoke long after Giō's dismissal. Thus Giō and Hotoke, exquisitely talented performers though they were, ended up paying the price for relying on Kiyomori's fickle patronage.

However, through the bond of solidarity Giō and Hotoke shared, Hotoke, at least, was able to assert agency over her own life and, contrary to Kiyomori's wishes, make the decision to leave his patronage and become a nun. In doing so, Hotoke released herself from a potentially miserable fate, and her selfless concern for Giō released Giō from the burden of her negative feelings toward Hotoke, allowing both women to achieve true peace at the end of their lives. The performers' decision to leave the secular world behind symbolizes the strength they have found together, moving beyond the reach of all men who would abuse them, including Kiyomori.

### **Jijū and Yuya**

While kinship between performers figures prominently in "Giō," another episode that comes much later in *Tale of the Heike*, "The Journey Down the Eastern Sea Road," features a *yūjo* called Jijū and her mother Yuya, but focuses mostly on the prisoner Taira no Shigehira, a son of Kiyomori. The Kakuichi version of the episode, which is situated in Chapter 10, goes like this. After the Heike are defeated at the battle at Ichi no Tani and Shigehira is captured by the Genji clan, he is forced to travel to Kamakura down the Eastern Sea Road to be judged by the new Minamoto commander, Yoritomo. Along the way, Shigehira and his captors stop for the night at an inn in Ikeda, where Shigehira is entertained and comforted by Jijū. She is reputed to be an outstanding poet, even the best along the entire Eastern Sea Road. After Shigehira exchanges poems with Jijū and marvels at how skillfully her poem was composed, he is told by

his chief captor, the Genji retainer Kajiware no Kagetoki, that Jijū was once a favored courtesan of Taira no Munemori, Shigehira's older brother. Kagetoki continues the story:

She begged to be granted leave because her aged mother was still here at Ikeda, but Lord Munemori refused to release her. Early in the Third Month, she won his permission by composing this poem:

What am I to do? Springtime in the capital is precious to me, yet I fear the scattering of beloved eastern blossoms (*Heike* 337).<sup>14</sup>

Just from this short but heartfelt poem, it can be assumed that Jijū's patron, Munemori, wanted very badly for her to stay with him in Kyoto, probably for the springtime flower-viewing season. Jijū, who was very worried that her mother would pass away before Jijū was allowed to go see her again, resorted to writing a moving poem including the "scattering of beloved eastern blossoms" as an allusion to her mother's impending death. Though this short anecdote demonstrating Jijū's concern for her mother is the only display of solidarity between a performer and another woman in the episode, it serves as the main inspiration and foundation for a very famous and popular Nō play, *Yuya*, which I will be examining in the next chapter.

### **Iso no Zenji/Hōjō Masako and Shizuka**

Shizuka Gozen, a *shirabyōshi* and beloved consort of the acclaimed warrior Minamoto no Yoshitsune, is first introduced in Chapter 12 of the *Tale of the Heike*, in the episode "The Execution of Tosabō" (12:4). She is depicted as a clever woman with mettle, the daughter of the *shirabyōshi* Iso no Zenji, and a woman whom Yoshitsune cares about very much. After Yoshitsune falls into disfavor with his brother, the Kamakura shogun Minamoto no Yoritomo, he

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<sup>14</sup> Original poem: *Ika ni sen / miyako no haru mo / oshikeredo / nareshi azuma no / hana ya chiruran* (*Heike* 337).

must fend off assassins sent by Yoritomo. The first assassin, Tosabō Shōshun, arrives in the capital and makes his presence known to Yoshitsune, claiming he is there to go on a religious pilgrimage to Kumano. Yoshitsune puts two and two together and suspects Shōshun of being an assassin sent by Yoritomo, but Shōshun swears religious oaths to prove he is not. Late that night, Shizuka aids Yoshitsune greatly by reconnoitering the areas surrounding her master's residence, and using her sharp wits to figure out Shōshun's plan to attack Yoshitsune with a group of mounted horsemen. She notes, "People say the avenues are alive with warriors. There has been no summons from here: why are the provincial guards so active? This must be the work of that oath-writing monk who came today. I'm going to send someone to find out what is happening" (*Heike* 406). Shizuka sends several messengers, one of them a servant girl, to scope out the situation. It is ascertained by the girl's reconnaissance that Yoshitsune is in danger of an imminent night attack, so Shizuka helps him into his armor and Yoshitsune's soldiers quickly dispatch Shōshun's force, then capture and behead Shōshun himself.

This episode of the *Tale* serves merely as an introduction to the character of Shizuka, who is further fleshed out in *Yoshitsune: a 15<sup>th</sup> Century Chronicle*, a collection of legends which tells the overall story of Minamoto no Yoshitsune's life and his flight from his brother's attempts to capture and kill him. Shizuka's characterization in *Yoshitsune* revolves around her complete and utter devotion to Yoshitsune, to the point that her main character trait could be said to be loyalty. Shizuka accompanies her lover during his mad dash from the capital only for a little while; before Yoshitsune passes through the mountains of Yoshino, he commands Shizuka to return to the capital at the behest of his retainers, who do not want to travel rough terrain with a woman in tow. The party leaves Shizuka in the wintry mountains, after which she is deserted by her cowardly escorts and left alone with no protection or compass. A more fragile-minded

woman may have become bitter or given up altogether after being abandoned by her lover and her only human company in a wild and isolated place, but Shizuka wanders the freezing mountains alone for days, her thoughts dedicated only to Yoshitsune and how he might be faring.<sup>15</sup>

Eventually, Shizuka reaches a mountain temple on its festival day, where many people are gathered to sing and dance for the temple's deity. Shizuka prays to the deity: "If I could do as I chose, I too would demonstrate my piety by dancing. I beg of you to see me safely to the capital, and to reunite me with my beloved lord. If my petition is granted, I will make a pilgrimage here with my mother, Zenji" (*Yoshitsune* 170). Shizuka cannot dance for the deity out of fear that if she does, she will be discovered by the crowd as the *shirabyōshi* consort of Yoshitsune. In *Yoshitsune*, Shizuka is said to have gained renown throughout the capital and an imperial commendation by serving an important religious function. A long drought that no ceremony could put an end to afflicted the capital, and no amount of *shirabyōshi* dances or prayers offered by the Retired Emperor had any effect. However, the moment Shizuka danced, a great downpour began which lasted three days. Since then, Shizuka became extremely recognizable to many people, so she chooses not to dance for the deity in order to keep her identity a secret from the festivalgoers. In her prayer to the deity on the mountain, Shizuka mentions Iso no Zenji, the *shirabyōshi* Shizuka is nearly always introduced as the daughter of in medieval literature, including *The Tale of the Heike* and *Yoshitsune* itself. Beginning with Shizuka's abandonment in the Yoshino mountains, Iso no Zenji becomes a pillar of support for Shizuka in the narrative, both as her mother and as a fellow entertainer.

Throughout the course of her life story, Shizuka's strong loyalty is not directed only

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<sup>15</sup> Though Shizuka is briefly alone here, it is worth mentioning that "Hosokawa has emphasized that...Shizuka never travels alone, but always with a female companion. The *shirabyōshi* and other itinerant female specialists...traveled in tandem for obvious reasons of safety" (Faure 60).



toward Yoshitsune, although that is the emphasis in some depictions, such as in *Nō*. In *Yoshitsune*, however, the kinship bond and mutual devotion expressed between Shizuka and her mother come into play after Shizuka is captured by Yoritomo's forces; this happens because, even though she was careful not to dance, Shizuka decides to sing for the deity at the mountain temple during the festival, and the skill and beauty of her song ends up exposing her as Yoshitsune's famed *shirabyōshi* courtesan. After they recognize her, the monks of the mountain temple kindheartedly drop Shizuka off in the capital to live with Iso no Zenji rather than taking her to Yoritomo, but after a few months Shizuka is found to be pregnant with Yoshitsune's heir. Yoritomo, fearing that Yoshitsune's son will grow up to attempt to avenge his father, forces Shizuka to Kamakura to be put under surveillance, with the intent that a male child be killed but a female child be spared.

Iso no Zenji herself, who was not a major presence in *Yoshitsune* until this point, is all of a sudden developed into a complex character with a full complement of emotions thanks to her reactions to Shizuka's dilemma. While Shizuka is being taken to Kamakura, Zenji convinces herself that she must go, too; her dear daughter's life is at stake, and she cannot bear to let Shizuka be dragged away alone. Here is where the solidarity between Shizuka and her mother, both female entertainers who are being dealt a cruel fate by a powerful man, first comes into real focus. Shizuka and her mother's situation echoes that of Giō and Hotoke while they were being taken advantage of by Kiyomori. In their case too, they are up against the head of a powerful warrior clan, Yoritomo of the Genji. Similar to Kiyomori's pattern in the "Giō" episode, Yoritomo does not waver in his mistreatment of the two entertainer women he has forcibly invited into his company. He viciously orders the unborn child ripped from Shizuka's body, but a sympathetic retainer manages to change Yoritomo's mind and convinces him to wait for the

actual birth. Zenji, meanwhile, prays to all the gods that Shizuka's baby be born a girl. Despite her supplications, the child is a boy, and Yoritomo orders him to be quickly drowned in the ocean. Yoritomo's retainer snatches the baby and rides off to the beach, while Zenji runs after him on foot. By the time she gets there, the baby is already dead.

Shizuka resolves to stay in Kamakura to worship at the Hachiman Shrine once her ritual defilement from childbirth has ended, something Zenji reminds her that she swore to do should she survive Yoritomo's wrath. The extended stay gives Yoritomo the opportunity to take advantage of Shizuka yet again, this time requiring her to perform a dance for him, her hated enemy. Upon hearing the order, Shizuka flatly refuses it and turns the messenger away. She laments her existence as a *shirabyōshi*, remarking to her mother, ““Ours is a cruel profession. If I were not a dancer, I wouldn't be ordered to perform before someone I detest while I'm still overcome with grief”” (*Yoshitsune* 227). Regardless, Shizuka is persuaded to do a splendid dance during her visit to the Hachiman Shrine, not knowing who would be there in attendance. She notices Yoritomo in the crowd of people gathered around to see her perform, so she sings an *imayō* that references a *shizu* (bobbin), a play on Shizuka's name: “Like the *shizu*, *shizu*, *shizu* bobbin, ever repeating. Would that I could somehow make yesterday today. How I long for him – the person who vanished, cleaving a way through the white snows of Yoshino's peaks” (*Yoshitsune* 234).<sup>16</sup> The song is an obvious reference to her love for Yoshitsune and almost seems to be mocking Yoritomo for his failure to capture his brother, which incenses Yoritomo to the point that he appears ready to attack Shizuka.

The person who calms his rage is none other than Hōjō Masako, Yoritomo's wife. Throughout *Yoshitsune*, Masako is shown to be partial to female entertainers, and could be seen as yet another woman who follows the pattern of solidarity among women. Masako diffuses

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<sup>16</sup> Original poem: *Shizu ya shizu / shizuka otamaki / kurikaeshi / mukashi o ima ni / nasu yoshi mo ga na* (Oyler 309).

Yoritomo's anger by reminding him that entertainers, especially women, are helpless: "“Though we are all fellow pilgrims on the road of life, there has to be a special bond of sympathy between a dancer and her audience,” interposed Lady Masako. ‘How could someone in Shizuka’s position be expected to perform before you? No matter what provoking things she says, she is only a weak woman. Forgive her’”(Yoshitsune 235). Masako effectively utilizes the social stereotype of the emotionally unstable woman as an excuse to explain away Shizuka’s rebellious nature, which results in the neutralization of Yoritomo’s thoughts of retaliation. Also, Masako’s apparent understanding of the importance of emotion between performer and audience is a bit surprising, considering she is a high-ranking political figure and not an entertainer herself. This is probably an indication on Masako’s part of deep interest in the performing arts, and by extension, the performers involved. Earlier in the story, too, when Yoritomo issues his decree to kill Shizuka, Masako is moved to sympathetic tears for her. However, in that case, she did not do anything to try to deter her husband’s command, most likely because it would have been foolish to speak out on the side of the woman carrying Yoshitsune’s heir.

Shizuka’s story does not end on as satisfying a note as Giō and Hotoke’s story does. Sick with grief at losing both her lover and his child, Shizuka becomes a nun at the young age of nineteen, but the report of her eventual ascension to the Pure Land is tainted by her miserable experiences in life. Iso no Zenji makes valiant attempts to comfort her daughter, but to no avail. It is noted in the text of *Yoshitsune* that Shizuka does not consult her mother about becoming a nun, a sign that her depression was simply too overwhelming to allow for alternatives other than taking the tonsure. Purportedly locking herself away to chant sutras for the rest of her short life, Shizuka disappears from *Yoshitsune* with a whimper, rather than a bang. The small kindnesses that Iso no Zenji and Hōjō Masako showed Shizuka during her times of trial helped her avoid

mortal conflict, but in the end, kindnesses delivered by fellow women were not enough to smooth over the enormous wrongs Shizuka suffered as a woman at the hands of the men around her.

## CHAPTER 5

### FEMALE ENTERTAINER PAIRS IN NŌ

The success the tragic stories in *The Tale of the Heike* had with medieval audiences meant that nearly every character in the *Tale* became recognizable to a large number of people. The famous characters from *The Tale of the Heike* already possessed established personalities and intricate backstories, thereby allowing Nō playwrights to write those characters into new situations without needing to spend too much time explaining the characters' circumstances. This allowed plays centered around *Heike* characters to jump right into innovative new settings, and thus many such plays were written and performed. Zeami even states in *Sandō* ("Three Paths"; 1423), his work on how to compose Nō plays, "If, for instance, your source material is about a famous commander of the Genji or the Heike clans, take special care to write as it is told in the *Tale of the Heike*" (Quinn 297). This means that characters drawn from source materials such as *The Tale of the Heike* should be written in such a way as to preserve the essence of the original character: for example, a fierce warrior should be portrayed as fierce. Zeami says, "Depending on the [warrior] personage, a show of fierceness may at times be called for. Put to heroic phrases, it should be gripping" (Quinn 297). Zeami also wrote that entertainer characters, who are already known for song and dance, are easily adapted to Nō:

Make sure you understand that the personage [featured] in the original story for the play, the one who performs, has a crucial bearing on the dance and chant. Generally speaking,

the art of musical entertainment takes form in dance and chant. However celebrated an ancient or artist, if the personage is not the type to perform these two modes of acting, then visional affect cannot materialize. ...Among female personages there are Ise, Komachi, Giō, Gijo, Shizuka, Hyakuman; women such as these are accomplished artists. Since each of these personages is renowned for his or her ability in the entertainments of dance and chant, making any of them into the core figure of a noh ought naturally to work to good effect (Quinn 293).

Zeami goes on further to explain exactly how specific types of entertainer women should perform in Nō, notably adhering to the style the different types of entertainers actually performed in:

Among the other female types are Shizuka, Giō, Gijo, and the like. Since they are *shirabyōshi* dancers they should recite a *waka*, intone the entry chant with lingering fullness, mount the rhythm of the eight-beat measure, chant up into the third range, and stamp the rapid pattern, exiting with the dance. ...Then there are Hyakuman, Yamamba, and the like, who are *kusemai* performers; hence they should by and large be easy [to adapt]. ...Write with detailed attention to the authentic *kusemai* style, concluding the dance on the introductory chant pattern (Quinn 296).

The suitability of entertainers as characters for Nō plays made female entertainers, especially those from *The Tale of the Heike*, popular protagonists. In fact, there are a number of plays that star female entertainers as central characters. For example, the plays *Giō* and *Hotoke no hara* focus on the *shirabyōshi* Giō and Hotoke respectively. Another play that drew from *The Tale of the Heike* for inspiration is *Yuya*, which fleshes out the story of Jijū, her ailing mother, and her famous poem appealing to the sensitive side of her patron, Taira no Munemori. One play

featuring performers that does not include characters from the *Tale* is *Yamamba*; it incorporates *kusemai* dancers. I will be looking at all of the plays mentioned above as examples of the continuing trend of solidarity being showcased among performing women and I will explore how each play presents a different possible manifestation of the kinship bond.

### ***Yamamba***

*Yamamba* is a demon play often attributed to Zeami. In *Yamamba*, the *tsure* (companion role) is a *kusemai* dancer called Hyakuma Yamamba. The first part of her name is likely a reference to Hyakuman, the progenitor of the Kaga line of female *kusemai*. The second part is a moniker assigned to Hyakuma in accordance with the song she sings. This is explained by her chief attendant (the *waki*, or side actor) in a passage at the beginning of Act I of the play:

We live in the capital, and the lady with us is an entertainer known to one and all as Hyakuma Yamamba. The neighborhood kids call her that because she performs a song she composed about Yamamba making her mountain rounds. Hyakuma decided to make a pilgrimage to the Temple of Good Light, Zenkōji, and she asked us to accompany her. We are now on our way to Zenkōji in Shinano Province (Brazell 210).

The Yamamba mentioned is a legendary figure from Japanese folklore. The word *yamamba* “is most commonly translated as ‘mountain witch’ or ‘crone’...A [*yamamba*] is usually defined as a woman with superhuman strength who lives deep in the mountains, or a female demon who lives in remote mountains” (Hulvey 73). Hulvey, upon observing that modern female authors in Japan began injecting references to women becoming *yamamba* into their fictional narratives around the beginning of the twentieth century, hypothesizes “the [*yamamba*] may have some mysterious relationship to powerful female archetypes from ancient stories or myths. Perhaps the

[yamamba] of traditional Japanese folk tales harkens back to female prototypes in ancient creation myths that impart a sense of empowerment to women” (Hulvey 72). Zeami may have chosen the *yamamba* as the theme of Hyakuma’s performance in part because as a powerful demonic woman, Yamamba (as the one cast in the *shite*, or leading role, is named) inspires both visceral fear and awe in those who hear stories about her. Therefore, she has the potential to make an exciting Nō protagonist. The casting of Yamamba as the lead could also be to lend a sense of strength and character to the dancer Hyakuma herself, as she is an entertainer who expresses her craft through the story of the fearsome demoness.

In the play, before Hyakuma Yamamba’s party reaches the Zenkōji temple, they find that to get there they must cross a particularly dangerous mountain pass. The attendant asks a man (the *ai*, or Kyōgen actor) for directions. The *ai* tells the party, “Agero Pass is the path Amida himself takes as he descends to receive souls. Following this path is an initiation into the secrets of Buddhahood, but it is perilously steep” (Brazell 211). The party opts to take the pass despite its danger and is in the midst of crossing it when dusk suddenly comes earlier than expected. An old woman (the *shite*, Yamamba in disguise) appears and offers the weary pilgrims lodging for the night. After the party accepts, the old woman quickly reveals the agenda behind her generosity, singing a few lines and therefore displaying her own connection to the performance arts:

I have a special reason for offering you lodgings tonight. (*Switches to speech*) Please sing the song about Yamamba for me. I have wanted to hear it for a long time, and you can imagine what a treasured memory it would be for a country person like myself. (*Faces front and switches to song*) This is the reason I made the sun go down and offered you a place to stay. (*Faces the tsure*) Come, you must sing for me (Brazell 213).



The unsuspecting chief attendant takes issue with the old woman's request, and a dialogue opens up between the two, whereupon the old woman claims she herself is the mountain demoness Yamamba. She resentfully accuses Hyakuma of singing about Yamamba only superficially, without understanding the true Yamamba; again she asks Hyakuma, through the voices of the chorus, to "sing the song of Yamamba, the whole night through, and I will reveal my [true] form, sleeve to sleeve will I trace out your dance with you" (Brazell 214). "Sleeve to sleeve" is a trope used to express kinship and unity between dancers, and the phrase is present also in the *Giō* play I will be looking at later in this chapter, during the scene in which Hotoke first dances for Kiyomori alongside Giō.

Thus ends Act I, and the beginning of Act II heralds the arrival of Yamamba in her true demon form. Here, Yamamba comes back on stage singing words that highlight one of the play's main themes, the nondualism of the world, "In graveyards, beating their own bones, fiendish wraiths groan, bemoaning their deeds from former lives. In cemeteries, offering flowers, angelic spirits rejoice in the good rewards of enlightened acts. No! Good and evil are not two. What is there to bemoan? What to rejoice in?" (Brazell 217). Brazell has this to say about the concept of nondualism as exhibited in *Yamamba*:

This concept of nondualism, popular in medieval Japan, is also developed in the play *Eguchi*, in which a lowly female entertainer is revealed to be an incarnation of a deity [bodhisattva]. In *Yamamba*, the nature of identity is more complex, largely because of the presence of an entertainer called Hyakuma Yamamba (the tsure), who makes her living performing a song and dance (kusemai) about Yamamba. Reality and its imitation, truth and delusion, human life, nature and art intermingle as the "real" Yamamba appears to entertain the entertainer with the true form of her dance (Brazell 207).

When the *ai* who gave Hyakuma's party directions claimed that traversing the Agero Pass was "an initiation into the secrets of Buddhahood", perhaps unbeknownst to him, he was referring to Yamamba's presence in the mountains and her intent to help Hyakuma understand both the real Yamamba and the real truth of the world according to Buddhism. After Yamamba sings of the world's nondualism, the demoness does indeed entertain Hyakuma by showing her the true dance of Yamamba. Surprisingly, Yamamba's dance is not a fearsome one befitting the image of a demoness, but rather a dance laden with sorrow regarding the reality of her own solitary existence. The benefactor of this display, however, is not only the entertainer who can use the experience as inspiration to become an even better performer, but also Yamamba herself. Yamamba confesses to Hyakuma the staggering weight of loneliness and isolation from the rest of the world she feels through a lengthy *kuse* dance, which reads in part:

Sacred peaks soaring suggest ascent to enlightenment: lightless valleys deep betoken grace descending to mankind even to the center of the earth. And then there is Yamamba, birthplace unknown, lodgings uncertain, wandering with clouds and streams, no mountain depths unreachable. Certainly she cannot be human. With shifting form, like drifting clouds, temporarily transforming self, by attachment transfigured, a she-demon appears before our eyes; however, when right and wrong are seen as one, form itself is emptiness, and likewise Buddhism entails worldliness...

Then, too, she sports with humans: sometimes when a woodsman rests beside a mountain path beneath the blossoms, she shoulders his heavy burden and, with the moon, comes out the mountain going with him to the village below. At other times, where weaving girls work looms, she enters the window, a warbler in willows winding threads, or she

places herself in spinning sheds to help humans, and yet women whisper – it is an invisible demon they see (Brazell 221-223).

As this passage shows, Yamamba’s “special reason” for appearing before Hyakuma is to tell the entertainer who bears the demoness’ name the woes of actually being Yamamba, the mountain demon who is shunned and feared by all, even people she tries to help. Tyler writes:

Perhaps [Hyakuma], when she sees the wilderness, suddenly knows with awful certainty that her *kusemai* is only ‘foolish, pretty words’, a bauble and nothing more; then Yamamba is before her, terrifying. But when she and Yamamba dance, and Yamamba’s sings [Hyakuma’s] song, seed [(Hyakuma)] and fruit [(Yamamba)] conjoin. The song becomes transparent, praising the Buddha and turning the Wheel of the Law (proclaiming the Buddha’s message). Still, this turning of the wheel is not different from [Hyakuma] turning her sleeves, or Yamamba turning round the mountains. The *kusemai* is still a ‘song that takes us round this world with all its sorrows’: the song of one whose work, however painful, is still praise and testimony to higher truth (313).<sup>17</sup>

Tyler’s interpretation of the interaction between Hyakuma and Yamamba furthers the concept of the duality of the two performers, referring to Yamamba as a fruit and Hyakuma, her seed. The fruit and the seed are different things, and yet one encapsulates the other, in essence making them two parts of the same entity. In a way, Yamamba is reaching out to help Hyakuma, her ‘seed’, by furthering Hyakuma’s understanding of the world, life in relation to Buddhism, and the very subject of the famous song that keeps her in business as a performer. Yamamba also

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<sup>17</sup> The “foolish, pretty words” are the *kyōgen kigyō* previously explained in Chapter 2. Tyler states that “Po Chu-I hoped that his poems were not, at heart, just glittering vanities...but that they contained, after all, a redeeming seed of selfless truth” (312).

asks Hyakuma in return, not for prayers, but for a unique token of kinship. That is, near the end of the *kuse*, Yamamba beseeches Hyakuma to, “Return to the capital; tell the world these tales. But think! Is this still delusion? Brush it all away, everything, for dragging good and evil, Yamamba makes her mountain rounds in pain” (Brazell 223). Through the medium of the *kusemai*, Yamamba puts her name and her life’s story in Hyakuma’s hands, in hopes that better words about her will spread, humans will come to understand her better and her loneliness will someday be eased. In this way, Yamamba, both as an entertainer and as a woman, creates a unique bond of solidarity with her fellow female entertainer Hyakuma.

### ***Hotoke no hara* (Hotoke’s Field)**

The second play I will look at is *Hotoke no hara* (“Hotoke’s Field”). Though its author’s name is unfortunately lost to time, his inspiration clearly stemmed from the popular legend that the famous *shirabyōshi* Hotoke had her roots in Kaga Province, where the play is set. *Hotoke no hara* is usually referred to as a *mugen* or “phantasmal play”, a modern label that describes plays normally characterized by their limited cast of characters: a ghost, usually of a person or the spirit of an object that failed to attain salvation or that harbors a lingering resentment, a main priest, and sometimes his attendants. In *Hotoke no hara*, the ghost of Hotoke Gozen beseeches a traveling priest to pray for her so her spirit can be put to rest. She relates the tragic story of her life to the priest, probably as a way to relieve her spirit of the burden of her past.<sup>18</sup> If the presence of the ghost of Hotoke, a woman who famously achieved rebirth in Buddha’s Western Paradise, raises a question, the answer may lie in the *mugen* convention rather than invention on the author’s part. It would seem, perhaps contrary to the norm for a *mugen*-type play, that Hotoke’s spirit did not manifest itself as a restless ghost, angry and regretful over giving up, in the prime

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<sup>18</sup> This is an expression of the Buddhist practice of *sange* (or *zange*), “the practice of meditatively reviewing [worldly] attachments in order to deepen [a] previously experienced realization of transience” (Childs 53).

of her career, the wealth and prestige that came with Kiyomori's patronage. Instead, as Strippoli points out in her dissertation about the *Giō* legend, "...there may be a more practical reason for Hotoke's unlikely appearance as a ghost. *Hotoke no hara* is a *mugen nō*, and in a *mugen nō* the presence of a ghost is an essential requirement. Hotoke may appear in this play as a wandering soul not because of any bias against her salvation, but simply in order to fulfill a requirement of the genre" (127). In other words, Hotoke's spirit is probably residing in the field in Kaga Province, the setting of the play, because of her supposed origins there, rather than because of any lingering feeling of anger or hatred drawing her to that particular spot. The *mugen* ghost convention simply allows her to tell the story of her life to the play's audience.

The play's story is relatively simple, and, like *Yamamba*, carries strong Buddhist themes. A priest (the *waki*) and his attendants are on a pilgrimage that takes them through Kaga Province, specifically through the "Hotoke's field" for which the play is named. They settle for the night in the very same grass hut that was Hotoke's until she passed away there. Accordingly, a mysterious young woman (the *shite*, which is Hotoke in disguise) shows up to tell the priest that it is a memorial day and his presence is providential, for he should chant sutras and perform mass for Hotoke's salvation. The priest recognizes that because she is who she is, Hotoke Gozen, she does not really need any help on the road to Paradise. Then he replies to her wishes, "Now I am to pray for one who beyond doubt is destined for salvation" (Shimazaki 14). She is destined for salvation because she is Hotoke ('Buddha'), and all of the plants and animals in her field have attained salvation as well. The Lotus Sutra states that everything, even plants, can attain Buddhahood: "[The] Parable of the Plants' in the Lotus Sutra...says that the three grasses and two trees are watered equally by the rain of Buddha's preaching" (Shivley 140). Part of the Parable reads, "When one Buddha attains the Way and contemplates the realm of the Law, the

grasses and trees and land will all become Buddha” (Shivley 140). The invocation of the Buddha-nature of everything also serves as a reminder of the *imayō* Giō sang to Hotoke in *The Tale of the Heike* when she was forced to entertain Hotoke.

The priest asks Hotoke to tell him more about herself, at which point, mainly through the voices of the chorus, she reiterates the “Giō” episode from *The Tale of the Heike* from her own point of view. Afterward, she disappears, reappearing as the *shirabyōshi* Hotoke in her full dancing costume. She does a dance for the priest, during which they both speak of existential topics, the ephemerality of everything in the world and its pertinence to Buddhist Law. The grasses, trees and insects of the field bow to her who is Buddha in name. Finally, when her dance comes to an end, Hotoke disappears, leaving the priest alone in the field.

Some of the densest dialogue in the play is actually devoted to the story of Giō and Hotoke as found in the *Heike*, with few details changed. Though the story is still told in the third person, this time it is being told from Hotoke’s perspective. One segment is especially revealing of Hotoke’s thoughts about her own existence and comes directly after Giō is replaced by Hotoke in the story. The chorus sings in Hotoke’s stead:

Tearful rain fell without ceasing. Now I know, because our wishes are never fulfilled, we call this a weary world. I, a woman, though ever so fair, am a flower of evanescent glory. When it fades, why should we grieve? In spite of the raging storm, the pine stands, its green everlasting. When do we repent? When do we ever awake in this vain world? To one reflecting thus, an occasion like this has come as a revelation (Shimazaki 19).

This passage, the only major break in the retelling of the “Giō” story, is a veiled reference to the poem about grasses that Giō left on the screen before her departure from the capital. The passage serves as the play’s own ‘grasses poem’ of sorts; it breaks up the narrative at precisely the point

in the story in which the actual “Giō” episode featured Hotoke’s discovery of Giō’s poem. (After this passage, the tale picks up again at the point at which Hotoke goes in search of Giō’s hermitage). Taking the poem reference one step further, “an occasion like this has come as a revelation” expresses that Hotoke is being enlightened again, just as she was when she read Giō’s poem, but this time by telling the tragic story of her life to the priest. Therefore, in *Hotoke no hara*, it is not once, but twice that Giō’s poem is referenced as having helped Hotoke understand her own place in the world. Though Giō does not actually appear in *Hotoke no hara* herself, she still plays an important role in the story by having been the catalyst that caused the wheel of fate to turn for both of the women. By speaking up for Hotoke and getting Kiyomori to allow her to perform, then immediately being replaced by her, Giō was the one who not only enabled Hotoke to rise to a high position, but also the one who prompted the great feelings of guilt and sadness in Hotoke that led her to take the tonsure and join Giō in her hermitage. Because Hotoke is inextricably linked to Giō this way, a shadow of Giō hangs over the entire play, so she does not need to be a character to have her presence felt – a feeling which is not unusual in Nō.<sup>19</sup>

After the poetic passage, the retelling of the story resumes with Hotoke’s quest to seek Giō out wherever she has fled to. After Giō’s fall from grace, her feeling of kinship to Hotoke is understandably stifled by her sense of shame and loss in having been replaced. However, the turnabout comes with a verse sung by the chorus from Giō’s point of view after she has become a nun and Hotoke comes knocking at her door: “Oh, how surprising! As it is, even though, like this, I have renounced life, still the grudge harbored toward you has remained a vain attachment. But indeed, you were such a person at heart! Now I know, truly you are Hotoke [Buddha], like your

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<sup>19</sup> One other play which can convey the same type of feeling is *Izutsu* (attributed to Zeami), in which the wife of Ariwara no Narihira appears as a ghost overtaken by longing for her husband, though Narihira never appears as a character himself.

name” (Shimazaki 20).

As in *The Tale of the Heike*, Giō states that she has held on to her resentment toward Hotoke until Hotoke shows herself to be of outstanding character by taking the same path as Giō and thereby earning Giō's complete forgiveness. This is the only line ‘spoken by Giō’ in all of *Hotoke no hara*, a piece of the original story which was likely highlighted by the playwright because of the inherent link between Buddhist precepts and forgiveness. In this case, the play’s dialogue highlights the fact that Hotoke’s selflessness in casting off the trappings of everyday life and joining Giō on the path of Buddhism was able to absolve Giō of her remaining worldly feelings. This serves to both strengthen Hotoke’s connection to her name (Buddha) and to send a message about the importance of letting go of worldly attachments, which is one of the play’s main themes. In conclusion, the bond of solidarity between Giō and Hotoke in *Hotoke no hara* is displayed in various ways, though some are rather subtle. It is displayed through references to the “Giō” episode from *The Tale of the Heike*, such as Hotoke’s selfless gesture and Giō’s subsequent forgiveness of Hotoke, and it is presented anew in ways exclusive to the play, as seen when Hotoke makes reference to the grasses poem. The play frames Hotoke’s spirit’s existence in a larger Buddhist context, wherein nothing lasts forever: this is the same message Giō sent to Hotoke through the grasses poem, and the same message Hotoke showed to have properly received from Giō by taking the tonsure, giving something back to Giō by allowing her peace of mind in her nun’s retreat.

### **Giō**

Like *Hotoke no hara*, *Giō* is a work inspired by the “Giō” episode of *The Tale of the Heike*, and the author’s name is unknown. This time, Giō (who is cast in the *tsure* role) is present as a character alongside Hotoke (the *shite*), and the play’s story follows Hotoke’s arrival in the



capital and her desire to perform for Kiyomori. Rather than taking a subtle approach to expressing the link between Giō and Hotoke as in *Hotoke no hara*, *Giō* almost completely revolves around the solidarity Giō and Hotoke have as sister *shirabyōshi*. This is expressly presented several times throughout the play. Kiyomori's retainer, Senō Tarō (the *waki*), explains at the beginning of the play that Giō has already expressed her displeasure with Kiyomori because he turned down Hotoke's request for an audience with him: "...Giō has said to him, 'We two are alike, both making our way as entertainers, so it's only right for you to meet her'. And after saying that, Giō has absented herself from him for the last four or five days" (Matisoff 2). This diverges from the Kakuichi version of *The Tale of the Heike* in that Giō does not stop at reprimanding Kiyomori for his dismissal of Hotoke, but even goes so far as to refuse to see him in protest. This, of course, would have been a dangerous move for a mistress, especially a low-ranked performing woman, to try on someone as important and temperamental as Taira no Kiyomori, due to the fact that he could dismiss her at any time. However, the risk she takes by protesting in this way may serve as the first indication of Giō's premonition regarding her future situation. That is, when Senō Tarō makes it clear that Hotoke is to perform alone for Kiyomori, Giō responds to this by seemingly giving up even before she is formally dismissed, saying, "No reason for me to be here, I shall head for home" (Matisoff 13). Giō's response may seem excessively downcast, but Strippoli interprets this phrase in a more positive light, suggesting that the Giō in the play is aware of her own story:

Giō knows her destiny, and her haste to leave well before being dismissed by Kiyomori takes on a new meaning. She is probably not reacting in anger at being rejected; knowing from the beginning that Kiyomori will leave her, why should she be upset? More likely, what she is trying to do is speed up the events, so that her destiny can be fulfilled (125).

Hotoke, however, is extremely gracious to Giō throughout the play, making a point to the audience of how thankful she should be to Giō for recommending her to Kiyomori. After Hotoke has won Kiyomori's interest and Giō is told to rest while Hotoke dances solo, Hotoke tries to refuse to dance for Kiyomori if Giō is not there dancing alongside her. In fact, the first time she is summoned to dance for Kiyomori, she and Giō dance joyously in unison, "sleeve touching sleeve" (Matisoff 9). The camaraderie found in *Giō* is much stronger than it is in the *Heike* episode it is based on; from the beginning, Giō and Hotoke mutually care for one another, and no jealousy or ire ever develops between them in the play. The *kuse* section of the play, sung by the chorus while the two women dance, exemplifies this strong camaraderie. It shows that both Giō and Hotoke recognize that the fate of an entertainer is entirely up to the patron's whims, and recalls the fact that patronage itself can be the difference between life and death to an entertainer:

In this world of dream and reality, we waken today from yesterday's illusion, yet dream on ever again. Though of humble birth we set forth upon the path of women entertainers, giving pleasure at the will of fickle men of passion. Our budding blossoms unknown, hidden away like logs long buried in the earth, our splendor concealed, without good social ties we are constrained, held back from appearing like dew-laden pampas grass in full plume (Matisoff 12).

The play ends with Hotoke reluctantly dancing solo for Kiyomori, but in her song, she shows herself to be aware of her own story as well:

...And at some point I too will bear the troubles of the heart, I know... His feelings may fade, his feelings may fade, and his affections shift, but, Giō Gozen, take it not to heart.

To Buddha, the source of my name, and to the gods I vow, I'll speak of no deep bonds to him (Matisoff 15).

Hotoke apparently already knows the message of Giō's grasses poem and her own fate as a woman and a *shirabyōshi*. Unlike Giō, Hotoke does not truly attempt to rebel against Kiyomori's wish for her to dance solo, so she ends up dancing for him anyway, most likely because that is how the original story went, and to diverge from it on such a grand scale would be disrespectful to the source material.

The surface differences between *Hotoke no hara* and *Giō* as works based on the same source are easy to spot, but fundamentally they are both plays expressing the ephemerality of a performer's life. This is a common theme among medieval performers, perhaps because their extra sensitivity to the arts made performers, and by extension, the playwrights who created works about performers, more acutely aware of the transience of things like beauty and enjoyment. If performers did actually possess this awareness, one way they might have consoled themselves over it could have been by forming strong, unshakable friendships with each other, like Giō and Hotoke did, as a way to counteract the idea that nothing is permanent.

### ***Yuya***

Another story of solidarity is found in the Nō play *Yuya* (author unknown), which has its foundation, like *Hotoke no hara* and *Giō*, in the *Tale of the Heike*. While *Hotoke no hara* is a phantasmal play in which the story's events have already occurred and are relived on stage by a ghost, and the protagonists in *Giō* seem to already know their own story, *Yuya* has a decidedly more realistic flavor. The play is based on the "Journey Down the Eastern Sea Road" episode from *The Tale of the Heike*. Yuya (the *shite*) is an accomplished *yūjo* and great poetess under the patronage of the *waki*, Taira no Munemori, who is Taira no Kiyomori's son. It should be noted

that in the Kakuichi manuscript version of the story, “The two characters, mother and daughter [Jijū and Yuya], are somehow conflated... Shigehira sleeps and exchanges poems with Jijū, but Jijū is described with Yuya’s characteristics” (Strippoli 72). Normally, Yuya is the daughter, and Jijū the mother, as it is in the Nō play.

The conflict of the play arises when Yuya receives a letter from her gravely ill mother begging Yuya to come back to the provinces to see her one last time. Unfortunately, despite how much Yuya might beg him, Munemori is reluctant to let her leave the capital, as he is greatly anticipating the peak of the springtime flower-viewing season, which he wants to share with her. In the end, Yuya composes a poem so beautiful and touching about how much she would like to be there for her mother that Munemori feels he has no choice and finally, with much reluctance, gives her leave to depart. The poem uses the spring imagery of ephemeral cherry blossoms and reads, “A spring rain falling, is it falling tears? Is it falling tears? Cherry blossoms falling, without a sad heart who can look on them? Who can look on them?” (Shimazaki 143-144).<sup>20</sup>

Yuya is a model daughter in the play, going so far as to possibly put her patronage in jeopardy out of love for her mother and the need to fulfill her mother's last wish to see her. Given that the patronage of an important person was extremely rare, and securing it was the ultimate goal of an entertainer, Yuya's willingness to risk Munemori's ire by putting her mother before him shows just how important she is to Yuya. The tenuous balance Yuya strikes between evoking Munemori's compassion and his anger is displayed in the following passage:

Munemori: I understand how you feel about your aged mother's illness, however, just for this spring, you are my companion at flower-viewing parties, how can you forsake me?

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<sup>20</sup> Original poem: *Harusame no / furu wa namida ka / furu wa namida ka / sakurabana chiru o oshimanu / hito ya aru* (Shimazaki 145).

Yuya: I tremble to say anything about your words, however, flowers bloom each time spring comes round, not only now. But here is a transient life's thread, a long separation threatens it. Please give me leave, I beseech you (Shimazaki 124-126).

This bond between mother and daughter is clearly demonstrated in many parts of the play, including the scene in which Yuya reads her mother's lengthy and tearful letter, which reads in part:

It is my wish that you beseech your lord well so that a brief leave be granted and once more you may come to see me. As it is, the bond of parent and child lasts only during this life. Even in this life should you fail to live with me, from the way of filial duty would you deviate. I would repeat over again, while still in this life, just once more I wish so much to see you (Shimazaki 122).

Here, Yuya's mother expresses concern for her dear daughter's spiritual integrity in regard to filial piety while simultaneously pleading to see her one last time. Yuya, likewise, is consumed by thoughts of her mother even as she is forced by Munemori to partake of frivolities in the capital. She prays to Kannon, "Reveal your power miraculous, take my mother into your protection" (Shimazaki 132). The reciprocal kinship bond in this play is characterized by a familial tie instead of a professional one such as that between Giō and Hotoke, but the stories are the same at heart. *Yuya* makes it apparent again that the strength of the woman-to-woman bond can empower women like Yuya, who refused to be discouraged the first or even the second time she was denied leave to see her mother, but ultimately received it from the stubborn Munemori in the end.

## CODA

By delving into the world of female entertainers in medieval Japan, we have been able to observe their historical background and the typical expressions of their characters in a selection of medieval narratives and Nō plays. The tendency for medieval authors to depict female entertainers as women who were able and willing to form bonds with their fellow women in times of trial has been clearly demonstrated by Mujū Ichien's *setsuwa*, *The Tale of the Heike*, *Yoshitsune* and various Nō plays. Even Japan's recent NHK Taiga drama, *Taira no Kiyomori* (2012), is written in accordance with this trend, hundreds of years after the actual dances of the historical *shirabyōshi*.

The serialized historical drama *Taira no Kiyomori*, which takes place before and during the events of *The Tale of the Heike*, is worth looking at briefly because it features a reconstruction of historical performing women. Several *shirabyōshi* in traditional red and white costume dance and the first lines of an *imayō*<sup>21</sup> are sung during the program's opening credits, stressing the link between Kiyomori and his putative mother, who in the program is a *shirabyōshi* and a concubine of Retired Emperor Shirakawa (1053-1129). Because it is foretold by a diviner that Shirakawa's son will bring misfortune to the Imperial family, Kiyomori's mother, Maiko, goes into hiding with the infant Kiyomori, but she is eventually found and brought before Shirakawa to be killed. Just before Shirakawa's soldiers execute mother and son,

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<sup>21</sup> RH 359: *Asobi o sen to ya umarekemu / tawabure sen to ya mumareken / asobu kodomo no koe kikeba / waga mi sae koso yurugarure* ("Was I born to play? Was I born to frolic? As I hear the children playing, even my old body starts to sway") (Kim 133).

Lady Gion, Shirakawa's wife (who is widely believed to be an entertainer herself), speaks out on Maiko's behalf and offers evidence that proves the baby is not cursed.<sup>22</sup> She pleads with Shirakawa to forgive Maiko and let her and her baby live. In order to save face after gullibly believing the child was unlucky, Shirakawa has Maiko killed, but spares Kiyomori, entrusting the child to the warrior Taira no Tadamori. Before she is shot full of arrows, Maiko reveals a dagger and makes a dash for Shirakawa, displaying significant courage in the face of death. Though Maiko was ultimately executed, thanks to Lady Gion's intervention and her pleas to Shirakawa, Maiko's child was at least allowed to live.

Lady Gion beseeching Retired Emperor Shirakawa to spare Maiko may recall Hōjō Masako's plea to Yoritomo to spare Shizuka in *Yoshitsune*. The tendency for female entertainers to be portrayed as women who often express compassion toward their fellows or arouse compassion on the part of other women endures in *Taira no Kiyomori*, portrayed much the same as it was hundreds of years earlier in a war chronicle like *Yoshitsune*.

Far from being reliant on solidarity out of weakness, we have seen that the entertainer women in narrative and Nō use their bonds with each other and the women they care about to further reinforce their own resilient spirits and to try to counteract the feeling of ephemerality that entertainers are described as being acutely aware of. What is more, in the male-dominated climate of the medieval period, bonds of solidarity let performing women in narratives assert agency over their own lives, sometimes contrary to their patron's commands (Giō and Hotoke). Through these bonds, women were also able to express filial piety (Yuya and Jijū) and draw what little comfort was available to them from sympathetic supporters (Shizuka and Iso no Zenji/Hōjō Masako). Re-imaginings of these stories, such as those found in Nō, did not ignore

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<sup>22</sup> For more information on Gion, see *The Tale of the Heike* (McCullough) 215-220 and Strippoli 68-69.

the importance of the woman to woman bond, and even strengthened it at some points. (The play *Giō* is a good example of this).

In conclusion, what we can discern from portrayals of female entertainers in medieval narrative and Nō is that there was a definite tendency by writers to portray entertainers as compassionate individuals who recognized their own ephemerality and who were not afraid to do what they thought was right for themselves and for the women around them. The idea of the sympathetic yet strong female entertainer is one that spans genres, and even manages to make an appearance in today's media in the drama *Taira no Kiyomori*. The bonds of solidarity displayed by medieval female entertainers in narrative accounts and in Nō not only endured throughout successive retellings of the performers' stories in premodern Japan, they have endured many centuries beyond their time, providing examples of feminine strength and camaraderie.



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